PROTECT YA NECK (REMIX)

MUSLIMS AND THE CARCERAL IMAGINATION IN THE AGE OF GUANTÁNAMO

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The small man builds cages for everyone he knows.
While the sage, who has to duck his head when the moon is low,
Keeps dropping keys all night long for the beautiful rowdy prisoners.
—Hafiz, "Dropping Keys"

THE SCREENING OF THE GILLO PONTECORVO'S 1965 FILM *BATTLE OF ALGIERS* AT the Pentagon in 2003 revealed a great deal about American imperial ambition and the measures that they were willing to take in order to fulfill the neocon prophesy of "full spectrum dominance." As a result of the Pentagon screening, the film has garnered a great deal of attention and quite predictably has also been completely reappropriated by the Beltway belligerati not as the embodiment of the struggles for national liberation against racist colonial violence but instead as a blueprint and training manual for "terrorism" in a post-9/11 world. In framing the film in this way, American officials engaged in an act of selective memory and collective amnesia as they attempted to erase the history of colonialism and violence that is endemic to the European and American encounter with the Third World. Not only that, this attempt at historical revisionism also sought to erase America's own complicity with, and extension of, European colonialism as the Cold War unfolded (Iran, Vietnam, the Congo, etc.) while also attempting to reaffirm their current occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan as another example of American imperial benevolence.

What else was the United States hoping to gain from viewing the film? How to deal with an insurgency? How to win the battle but not lose the "hearts and minds" of the colonized? The film anticipates many of the forms of control and

violence exhibited within the current American imperial project such as the military-media alliance, the multiple forms of surveillance of the Muslim body (check points, cameras, searches), the use of counterrevolutionary methods (bombings of civilians, psychological warfare, disinformation), and the empty rhetoric of "democracy" when done at gunpoint. But it is the central role of torture and the prison as technologies of colonial violence within the film that eerily anticipate the revelations at Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo, Bagram and other U.S. detention centers throughout the world.

How are we to understand the place of torture and incarceration as forms of control in the current global order of imperial violence? While torture and colonial imprisonment used by Europeans and the United States as forms of counterinsurgency against Black and Third World peoples is not new, the sands seem to be shifting. Because in this new age of empire where the formal elements of colonization no longer persist, but their neoliberal residue does, we are now seemingly in a situation where the nation-as-prison has become the operative model for continued Euro-American dominance. Where the nation was once the site for liberation, it is now the space for violent containment—as economic control vis-à-vis International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization policy, strict control over migration flows, increased militarization, and Western-backed repression within the global south have severely controlled the lives of the majority of the worlds peoples. But just as violent is the possibility that the nation-as-prison is no longer only expressed through the ambient force of postcolonial power and the bloody borders drawn by the West. Instead, the erection of prison walls, electric fences, minefields, concrete barriers, and barbed wire now emerging around the West Bank, the Afghan-Pakistan border, and the U.S.–Mexico border have become the de facto practice that now tragically separates peoples, histories, and even the possibilities for change. The metaphoric is now the literal as the border watchers, checkpoint battalions, and anti-immigrant hysteria running rampant in the West still presumes that we from the global south are guilty, yet on furlough, and allowed to work, survive, or even cling to life—but only if deemed "useful" in a highly racialized neoliberal global order.

These contemporary configurations of power have, according to Achille Mbembe, historic roots within a European juridical order based upon a racialized hierarchy of nation-states. For Mbembe, the colony—that space existing at the frontiers of "civilization"—has its roots within the slave plantation. Through the idea of "necropolitics," Mbembe views modern war as an extension of previous "topographies of cruelty" emanating from Europe and the United States—such as the *colony* and the *slave plantation*—where race becomes the arbiter that not only determines but also sanctions who can be killed and who will be allowed to live as imperial power unleashes itself.[1] Where Mbembe links the plantation and the colony through violence and race, Loïc Waquant links the *plantation* to the *prison* as an extension of racial violence within the United States.[2] I am interested in the cartographies of American power that link the *colony* to the *prison*—where the domestic politics of race and captivity that sit at the heart of

the empire become the means by which those in the colony become legible under brutal American power. The linking of American imperial reach today, through the space of the prison, becomes a way of exploring and exposing the lie that is "American exceptionalism"—a brutal charade about a mythic American universalism that not only fractures America's historic complicity with European empire building, but also masks America's own violent history as an expansionist power through slavery, Native genocide, and its imperial ambition throughout the globe up to today.

In exploring the prison as an emerging form of transnational power and empire state building of *Pax Americana*, my interest lies in the increasingly blurred lines between the foreign and the domestic, nations and their fragments, and nationalisms and their "others." In doing so, I borrow from the work of Amy Kaplan, who writes that "domestic and foreign spaces are closer than we think, and that the dynamics of imperial expansion cast them into jarring proximity."[3] For Kaplan, U.S. imperialism demands a coherent and stable national identity but U.S. imperial culture has continually created anxiety about this coherence as it expanded its power abroad. She states, "the idea of the nation as home is inextricable from the political, economic, and cultural movements of empire, movements that both erect and unsettle the ever-shifting boundaries between the domestic and the foreign, between 'at home' and 'abroad.'"[4] I want to examine these "movements of empire" through the space of the prison in order to explore the domestic and international regimes of imprisonment that have forged a kind of transnational "carceral imagination" around the most prominent figure of racial otherness today—the Muslim. In attempting to locate this "carceral imagination," this piece will explore the links between the global mapping of imprisonment and control of Arabs and South Asians as evinced by the emergence of Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo, secret detention centers, and the Orwellian euphemisms "extraordinary rendition" and "ghost detainees" with the domestic assault on African American Muslims in U.S. prisons who have been very recently targeted as a potential "fifth column" of recruitment and radicalization against the United States in the "War on Terror."

The racial anxieties about the threats posed by Muslim "terrorists" abroad are projected upon its domestic racial analog—African American Muslims—an anxiety that is more acute due to the ambivalent place of Blackness within the history of U.S. expansionism and imperial culture. Made legible through the historic gaze of American imperial power, the presence of African American Muslims within the United States threatens a coherent national identity that upsets racial hierarchies and domestic unity. As Kaplan says, "underlying the dream of imperial expansion is the nightmare of its own success, a nightmare in which the movement outward into the world threatens to incorporate the foreign and dismantle the domestic sphere of the nation."[5]

The racialized figure of the Muslim haunts the geographic and imaginative spaces of American empire. As the site of the phantasmatic, the excessive and the perverse, the tortured figure of the Muslim—be it the immigrant and

foreign (Arab, Asian, Persian or African) or indigenous and domestic (African American)—fluidly and flexibly mobilizes various constituencies, nationally and internationally, in the service of American imperial designs. Whether it's "freeing Muslim women" abroad, creating fractures within and between African Americans and immigrants in the United States, mobilizing Christian evangelicals, liberal multiculturalists, right-wing extremists, New Right culture warriors, and anti-immigrant xenophobes, the figure of the Muslim has been used to cultivate tremendous ideological ground by containing and limiting the scope of dissent, forging an imperial citizenry, masking structural inequalities and massive economic instability, and reinforcing the philosophical basis of "colorblindness" by promoting an American triumphalism in which a panracial enemy (the Muslim) threatens a multicultural America.

In a global order structured along the lines of race, this is not the first time in American history where race has been the thread that negotiates the interplay and fluidity between the foreign and domestic realms of American power. With the end of World War II and the dawning of the Cold War, the United States used the threat of "Communism" as a proxy for race as it sought to replace Europe as a global power in the era of decolonization and national liberation movements—using "anticommunism" (via the Truman Doctrine) to fulfill American imperial desire through interventions within the Third World to destabilize the burgeoning anticolonial and anti-imperialist movements taking place in Asia and Africa. The "Communist" threat also achieved its domestic goals on race by fracturing very powerful alliances being forged by African Americans who sought to tie their claims toward racial justice to those within the Third World. Instead, the rhetoric of "anticommunism" birthed a heightened American nationalism as influential African American liberals who sought to gain concessions on civil rights domestically supported violent American foreign policy throughout Africa and Asia. This fractured an emergent Black internationalism by containing antiracism within a national framework and created new kinds of imperial citizen-subjects during a new period of empire building. But it also isolated and increased the domestic repression of African Americans (such as Du Bois and Robeson) who linked the legacies of slavery with colonialism in the Third World as a means toward systemic change rather than reform against Jim Crow segregation, disenfranchisement, and civil death.[6]

Similarly, in a post–Cold War era, the rhetoric of "terrorism" has also become a proxy for race, generating tremendous political and ideological capital. The sine qua non for "terrorism" has been the Muslim—a highly racialized figure that has been mobilized to reinforce American hegemony abroad, while also containing antiracist and economic justice movements domestically. This threat of "terrorism" to American interests abroad has justified a violent reassertion of American power and militarism to extend Cold War alliances, further American geopolitical dominance, and refashion the United States as the sole power in a unipolar world through "preemptive war," covert intervention, aggressive militarism, and unilateralism. Domestically, the threat of "terror" from the *immigrant* Muslim

has justified a highly racialized and vicious crackdown on immigrants in the United States, as the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS), now under the Department of Homeland Security, has normalized deportations, detentions, and disappearance. In addition, the increasing prominence of the figure of the *indigenous* Muslim—the African American Muslim—within the security apparatuses and mainstream political discourse carries tremendous symbolic and historic significance, as African American Muslims have historically been constructed as fundamental threats to American democracy and racial harmony dating back to slavery. The November 2007 PBS *America At A Crossroads* series episode "Homegrown: Islam in Prison" on African American Muslims revealed that these fears are alive and well, as the documentary's alarmist tone echoes within the U.S. security establishment around Black Muslim communities. This notion of an "enemy within" plays on highly racialized fears deeply embedded within the white imagination, while also heightening tensions within African American communities along class, religious, and political lines, as it polices the boundaries of race through its attempts at forging an imperial Blackness.

The ideological elasticity of the Muslim and the rhetoric of "terrorism" has morphed and begun to outline the contours of the threat posed by the figure of the African American Muslim. The racialized discourse of empire is now producing a subject where the foreign and the domestic collapse upon themselves, as fears of "terror" are conflated with "Black criminality," gangs, prison culture and urban violence. The carceral logic and captive power that has historically been forged around Blackness not only makes legible this new emerging "threat"—as it was the "logic" used by the Los Angeles Police Department in its recent testimony in Congress to "map" Muslim communities—but it also becomes the template for the exporting of this prison regime to the colony in the "War on Terror." This fear of "homegrown terrorism" that collapses the domestic and the foreign around the figure of the Muslim can be clearly seen in the recent, near unanimous passage of House Resolution 1955 ("The Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act of 2007"). This bill seeks to establish grant programs, assigning a university-based "Center of Excellence for the Study of Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism in the United States," and conduct research into how other countries—ostensibly in Europe—work to prevent "homegrown terrorism and radicalization." In addition, Michael Downing, the LAPD's commanding officer for "Counter-Terrorism" testified before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs in the U.S. Senate—one week after the passage of H.R. 1955—on the need to "map" Muslim communities in Los Angeles as a way to prevent—coincidentally–"homegrown terrorism" and "violent radicalization." In his testimony, Downing highlighted the need for this kind of surveillance, mentioning 9/11, the current wars, attacks in Europe and their policing of Muslims in their midst, and, not surprisingly, he cites gang culture in Los Angeles and the ways in which they have been policed as the blueprint and analog for mapping Muslim communities—"their history, demographics, language, culture, ethnic breakdown, socio-economic, status, and social interactions."[7]

Through the figure of the Muslim, then, I will trace the intimacies between the colony and the prison within the unfolding narrative of American imperial hubris by exploring the relationships between U.S. prisons and the emergence of imperial imprisonment in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantánamo and the connections being forged between the military and local police in the United States. I will also examine recently published reports by the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security, and Congressional committee testimonies to historicize the state's racialization of African American Muslim inmates. I will then close with a discussion of *Rap DNA*, the yet to be published prison writings of the most prominent incarcerated African American Muslim in the United States today, Imam Jamil Al-Amin (formerly H. "Rap" Brown), who was transferred in August 2007 from Georgia to the federal government's highest security prison—the Federal Supermax in Florence, Colorado. As a counternarrative to the State's captive power, his writings embody a stunning act of Michael Eric Dyson calls "Afrecriture."

In exploring these diverse narratives, it is important to view the broader architecture of power that is in place: that to "map" Muslims, police thought, invade, occupy, bomb, incarcerate, torture, render, and murder—these are not reflective of just a will *to* power, but is raw naked power in full effect, and it is this structure of power that is central to the whole notion of what I am calling the "carceral imagination." The American legal, political, and security apparatuses are animating this "carceral imagination" by constructing a domestic threat of "homegrown terrorism" around the figure of the African American Muslim and his potential links to "gang Islam," "prison Islam," and global "terrorist" networks. While the foreign Muslim has been incorporated within the prison regime through the exporting of American carceral power vis-à-vis Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo, and secret detention centers, the specter of the African American Muslim—as the "enemy within"—haunts the domestic homeland by shattering the divisions between the national and the global as the spaces of imperial power continue to converge.

FROM ABNER LOUIMA TO ABU GHRAIB

In *Discipline & Punish*, Michel Foucault argues that prior to the prison, violence inflicted upon the prisoner, or the executed, brought pleasure to the crowd as a parade of body parts became central to popular violence and the imagination that fueled it, and so the prison transformed punishment and its relationship to power. With the "birth of the prison" in the nineteenth century, "the great spectacle of physical punishment disappeared; the tortured body was avoided; the theatrical representation of pain was excluded from punishment. The age of sobriety in punishment had begun."[8] I am intrigued by Foucault's discussion about the birth of the prison, the public display of the body, and the "imagination" that it fuels in the Age of Abu Ghraib and the Birth of Guantánamo. For Foucault and others, the prison ushered in an "age of sobriety" around punishment when it seems that

the post-9/11 imperial state has revealed a new "age of excess" around torture, display, and penal power around the Muslim body.

For me, this "age of excess" is central to the globalization of imprisonment and the carceral logic of America's "War on Terror." In exploring the transnational logic of incarceration and the institutional links between the prison regimes around African American Muslims in the United States and the emergence of military prisons in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantánamo, history may have come full circle. According to Alan Gomez, a 1961 gathering called "The Power to Change Behavior: A Symposium Presented by the U.S. Bureau of Prisons" was a key moment in "the politicization of institutionalized brainwashing, behavior modification and torture within the prison regime" that resulted in a national directive to "experiment with these techniques, originally used against American POW's in Korea, on the black Muslim prison population." With these experiments, the federal government utilized physical and psychological torture to suppress political activity and dissent and to redefine accepted notions of "cruel, inhuman and torturous treatment."[9] With the emergence of the Nation of Islam and Malcolm X (as well as increased Muslim immigration and the anticolonialism of the Third World), the FBI and law enforcement agencies monitored Black Muslims as a potential threat to the emerging orthodoxy of the Civil Rights Movement, so that the use of Black Muslims in prison in the early 1960s for use in state-sanctioned torture and experimentation raises profound questions, not the least of which are its possible connections and historical precedents to the more recent tortures of Muslims in Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo, Bagram, and elsewhere.

The collapsing of the ideological and territorial boundaries between the foreign and the domestic are embodied in the increasing consolidation of the two major security institutions within American imperial culture—the military and the prison—revealing the emergence of a new kind of formation of power and domination used to implement a violent global order that has challenged and usurped both national and international juridical foundations through torture, the abrogation of habeas corpus, the Birth of Guantánamo, military tribunals, the Patriot Act, preemptive war, and the legal declaration of Muslims as not "falling within the definition of 'person.'"[10] This confluence between the military and the prison regime runs deep in the current "War on Terror." According to Avery Gordon, Mark S. Inch, the corrections and internment branch chief at the Office of the Provost Marshal General, stated that "the synergy between the reservist's civilian employment in the corrections field and his or her duty to confine enemy combatants in Afghanistan, Cuba [Guantánamo] and Iraq . . . could not be more evident and essential to mission success."[11] According to Gordon, the 300th Military Police Brigade, the 327th Military Police Battalion, and the 800th Military Police Brigade, designed Camp Delta at Guantánamo Bay, have run various detention centers throughout Afghanistan and have reorganized the prison systems in Iraq for enemy combatants and prisoners of war, respectively. In addition, prison guards and administrators at state and federal penitentiaries throughout the United States continue to contribute a great deal to America's

global archipelago of imprisonment—from John Vannatta, the superintendent of the Miami Correctional Facility in Indiana who works in Guantánamo, to many Chicago policemen and prison guards throughout Afghanistan, and to Captain Michael Mcintyre and Master Sergeant Don Bowen who work at the federal penitentiary at Terre Haute, Indiana, who helped to build the Iraqi prison system.[12]

According to Leah Caldwell, in May of 2003, just two months after the invasion of Iraq, Attorney General John Ashcroft gathered a group of American prison officials under the auspices of the International Criminal Investigative Training Program (ICITAP) and sent them to Iraq to prepare existing Iraqi prisons to house additional prisoners. ICITAP, which is based within the Department of Justice and funded by the State Department, has been in existence since 1986 and has been sent throughout the world to "rebuild" criminal justice systems and to support police and prison regimes in American-backed client states, including Haiti, Indonesia, and the former Soviet Union. According to Caldwell, ICITAP is a successor to a training program run by the Agency for International Development, which was stopped in the mid-1970s after it was revealed that this program was used to train police forces and prison officials abroad in murder and torture against mostly leftist insurgencies.[13]

What is especially revealing is that many of the prison officials sent by Ashcroft to Iraq were not only employed by private prison firms around the United States, but were also heads of various state departments of corrections throughout the country, including Terry Stewart (Arizona), Gary Deland (Utah), John Armstrong (Connecticut), and Lane McCotter (Texas, Mexico, and Utah). In fact, all have been involved in a range of human rights abuses and legal cases from inmates in the United States, including denial of medical treatment, harsh conditions, sexual harassment, torture, and even death. McCotter, who was forced to resign as head of Utah's State Board of Corrections due to the death of an inmate shackled naked to a chair, was, according to Gordon, chosen by then Attorney General John Ashcroft to head the reopening of Iraqi jails under American rule and also to train Iraqi prison guards just one month after the Justice Department released a report—following the death of a prisoner—about the lack of medical and mental health treatment at one Management and Training Corporation's jails, a private firm where McCotter was an executive.[14] To add insult to irony, McCotter and Deland were at the ribbon-cutting ceremony at Abu Ghraib when it first opened, as McCotter said of Abu Ghraib, it was "the only place that we agreed as a team was truly closest to an American prison."[15]

While the administrative and institutional framework for United States colonial imprisonment in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantánamo has deep ties to the domestic prison establishment, state corrections, and even private prison corporations, it is also the case that some of the guards involved in the Abu Ghraib tortures had careers within U.S. prisons. According to Anne-Marie Cusac, Ivan L. (Chip) Frederick II and Charles Graner worked in the United States as corrections officers. Frederick was a guard in Virginia while Graner, who was described as one of the "most feared and loathed of American guards"[16] at Abu Ghraib and

who is infamously known for his sinister glasses and wicked "thumbs up" signs in the released photos of torture, was an officer at the Greene County Prison in Pennsylvania.

According to Cusac, the Taguba Report investigating torture at Abu Ghraib found that U.S. military personnel placed detainees in sexually explicit positions, engaged in forced sodomy on Iraqis with chemical lights and possibly even a broom handle, beat them, and wrote vulgar epithets on their bodies. Cusac goes on to reveal that in 1998, Greene County guards, where Graner worked, were charged with sodomy with a nightstick, unlawful nude searches, and using prisoners' blood to write "KKK" on the floor of the prison.[17] In fact, according to Gordon, Graner was repeatedly "implicated in violence against prisoners at the Pennsylvania super-maximum security State Correctional Institute at Greene, where he was employed . . . and given supervisory roles at Abu Ghraib because of his guard experience."[18]

Ironically, part of Bush II's reconstruction plans for Iraq include the building of a "Supermax" prison where Abu Ghraib now stands as a way of erasing the stain and stigma of the tortures that went on there. The "Supermax" prison has proliferated throughout the United States, becoming the penal blueprint for imprisonment, and is widely seen as the most repressive kind of carceral power available. According to Gordon, "the Abu Ghraib photographs did not expose a few bad apples or an exceptional instance of brutality or perversity. They exposed the modus operandi of the lawful, modern, state-of-the-art prison. Nowhere is this clearer than in the growth over the past 25 years of what is called super-maximum imprisonment, the cutting edge in technology and the prototype for re-tooling the military prison for the war on terror."[19] In fact, Supermax prisons emphasize the state's desire for ultimate control, as the "language of security has authorized Supermax imprisonment by treating it not as punishment but as a set of administrative procedures for managing high-security populations."[20] More specifically, the policies and procedures used in Supermax facilities in the United States, "now legally sanctioned as ordinary and acceptable norms of prison life, were once considered violations of the U.S. Constitution's Eighth Amendment prohibiting cruel and unusual punishment. The Supreme Court's Eighth Amendment cases are the legal and linguistic basis for the "detainee interrogation" memos prepared for the War on Terror."[21]

As the American prison establishment exports to the outposts of empire new technologies of carceral power, the lines between the domestic and the foreign blur. And with the establishment of Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo, and other structures of imperial imprisonment in the "War on Terror," the legibility of "terrorists" as detainees is made possible through the domestic politics of race and incarceration. But the incorporation of the foreign Muslim within the imperial prison regime raises the haunting specter of a domestic analog: the African American Muslim.

HOME IS WHERE THE HATRED IS

In addition to the links between Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo, and other sites abroad with prison structures here in the United States, there is also an emerging connection being forged between local policing in the United States with the military. LAPD Chief William Bratton has been advocating and lobbying that Los Angeles become the national nerve center for an official agency collaboration between Homeland Security and local law enforcement throughout the country. And he has made tremendous institutional strides. Known for his part in the draconian implementation of the Manhattan Institute's "Broken Windows" policy in New York in the early 1990s under Rudolph Giuliani, which led to police abuse cases such as Abner Louima and Amadou Diallo, Bratton has declared a "War on Gangs" in Los Angeles, referring to gang activity as "homeland terrorism" and lamenting that the federal government "needs to get preoccupied with the internal war on terrorism as well."[22] This linking of local policing with global war, and the highly racialized language of "terrorism" linking Black black and Brown brown communities in the United States with their neocolonial counterparts in the Global South, forges an ideological link between domestic control and imperial power that generates tremendous political capital in a post-9/11 environment.

But Bratton takes the ideological and material links between domestic policing and colonial war much further. According to Bratton, there are about seventy LAPD officers in Iraq training with the United States military at any one time, while Los Angeles police officers have also trained Marines how to gather evidence at a bomb scene and also to give their guidance on urban policing for the United States military abroad.[23] In addition, the military is helping the LAPD prepare for the "eventuality" of suicide bombers and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Los Angeles. In fact, according to Bratton, a team of soldiers from the U.S. military in Baghdad visited Los Angeles to share with the LAPD their knowledge about "IED's and suicide bombers and the tactics employed by death squads and insurgents in Iraq."[24] Bratton continues, "We're always wondering why we don't have suicide bombers and IED's here. We're trying to learn from each other. It's only a matter of time before we are experiencing the issue here. We have no idea why it hasn't occurred. What they're dealing with is what we may face." For Bratton, there are "many similarities between what is going on in Baghdad and here. The similarities to gang warfare are strong."[25]

While the racial and ideological calculus behind such comparisons helps generate the necessary fear and political will needed for increased domestic repression, Bratton is suggesting something more—a rhetorical strategy that has historically resonated within the United States and has resoundingly reappeared in a post-9/11 climate that links Muslims, Blackness, prisons, and gang culture.[26] Bratton mentions the "growing influence of converted Muslim radicals in the U.S. prison system" who, upon release, will spread their new ideas to their companions such that gangs will conspire with "terrorist" organizations to carry out attacks on U.S. cities. As Bratton says, "There is a potential of some gangs who are disaffected to latch on to the Islam movement. We've seen movement in that direction."[27]

This kind of alarmist rhetoric echoes a larger concerted chorus of voices who are constructing an "indigenous" component to the global "threat" posed by Muslims. The projection of racial anxiety from the foreign Muslim to the domestic complement—the African American Muslim—mobilizes national fears, as African American Muslims in prisons are perceived as a "fifth column" of potential recruitment into "terrorist" activities within the United States. Not surprisingly, high level officials, numerous think tanks, policy institutes, nongovernmental organizations, and official state agencies have published reports and presented to several congressional committees and other law enforcement agencies their fears about African American Muslims within United States prisons, and their potential for "radicalization." This kind of institutional power bearing down upon what is being constructed as an emerging frontline in America's "War on Terror" is an extension of the policing and surveillance of Muslims in the United States over the last forty years or so and also a continuation of the pernicious forms of racial profiling that have impacted Black communities dating all the way back to slavery—what Loic Waquant argues is the historical continuity between the slave plantation and mass incarceration of African Americans within the United States.[28]

A 2004 Department of Justice report issued a series of warnings about the possibilities of African American Muslim "radicalization" within prisons, the emergence of "Prison Islam," and the lack of monitoring of and by Muslim chaplains that could lead to "extremist" ideologies circulating within prisons.[29] In 2005, FBI director Robert Mueller told the Senate Intelligence Committee: "Prisons continue to be fertile ground for extremists who exploit both a prisoner's conversion to Islam while still in prison, as well as their socio-economic status and placement in the community upon their release,"[30] and Republican Senator Susan Collins from Maine has said that radical Islam within U.S. prisons was "an emerging threat to our national security."[31] In April 2006, Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez also weighed in on the topic of Muslims in prison and the "challenges to detection" that this poses to authorities.[32] A 2006 study by the Homeland Security Policy Institute at George Washington Institute in conjunction with the University of Virginia was released at a Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee hearing on "homegrown" terrorists. It argues that, due to limited funds, there is little supervision of Muslims within prisons so that "radical Islam is spreading and raising a new generation of potential terrorists," and warns that "Jailhouse Islam," which is "based upon cut-and-paste versions of the Qu'ran and incorporates violent prison culture into religious practice,"[33] is a threat to prison security. In addition, Charles Colson, who was special counsel to Richard Nixon during Watergate in 1974, and who now runs the Prison Fellowship Ministries, says that al-Qaeda training manuals "specifically identify America's prisoners as candidates for conversion because they may be "disenchanted with their country's policies."[34] Colson asserts that "terrorism experts fear these angry young recruits will become the next wave of terrorists. As U.S. citizens, they will combine a desire for 'payback' with an ability to blend easily into American

culture."[35] In addition, Roy Innis, the national chair and executive director of the Council of Racial Equality (CORE), has also met with federal officials and has been vocal about the threat he perceives coming from African Americans Muslims who are not properly monitored both within and outside prisons.

As a "U.S. citizen" who can "blend easily into American culture" and who, according to Attorney General Gonzalez, poses "challenges to detection," African American Muslims become the site upon which the projection of racial anxiety from the foreign Muslim—who is deemed more recognizable by his "foreign-ness"—is branded. But because of the historic relationship of Blackness within the United States, and the familiarity that this contempt bred, African American Muslims are potentially more threatening and not racially legible in the same ways that the foreign Muslim is. The carceral regimes in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantánamo are then, in Kaplan's formation, the "success" which has birthed a "nightmare" that now threatens the domestic front of American imperial culture and which is woven through the very rhetoric about African American Muslims in prisons, as they are threats not only to the "security" of the prison regime (as prison officials have declared) but also to the very organizing logic of the state's architecture of power.

This specter of threat is deeply rooted within fears of African American conversion to Islam, particularly as prisons have become the site for transformations in selfhood of all types, where a whole new aesthetics of being erupts. For African American Muslims like Malcolm Little—who got his "X" inside—or H. Rap Brown–who, in the 1970s, became Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin—the prison becomes the crucible for a rejection of that imposed master narrative of nonbeing and the subjection of Blackness upon which—through chattel slavery, disenfranchisement, and social death—America ultimately rests. For if prison is about disappearance and erasure, silence, and violence, then epiphany, conversion, and politicization are a kind of ontological resurrection against social and civic death—redefining one's existence and challenging the panoptic power of the state.

Conversion then, is what Richard Brent Turner calls "signification,"[36] and is a stunning effacement of the state's attempt to contain blackness within the ideological boundaries of the United States and its history of enslavement. As Chuck D argues, "if people with African roots are connected to Islam, then you got a problem of taking your slaves away, 'we lost our slaves—they're international now!'"[37] As Chuck D's poignant argument suggests, this *loss* demands that African American Muslims be monitored, policed, and disciplined as fundamental threats to the American racial project and its imperial ambition. The fear of their incorporation stems from their forging of an alternative Black identity and community of belonging rooted in an expressed solidarity with Third World liberation struggles, their fundamental and radical challenge to America's racial hierarchies rooted in white supremacy, and their remapping of a Black diasporic identity that Amiri Baraka referred to as "post-American."[38] In occupying a liminal space within the United States, the presence of African American Muslims, especially

in the post-9/11 moment, shatters the coherence of American nationhood and haunts the tattered edges and imaginative spaces of the empire.

THE LAST REAL NIGGA ALIVE

Rap became a version of Malcolm and Martin.
<div align="right">—Nas, "Last Real Nigga Alive"</div>

Who frame Rap Jamil Al-Amin?
<div align="right">—Amiri Baraka, "Somebody Blew Up America"</div>

Imprisoned in 2000 and sentenced to life in Georgia State Prison at Reidsville, Imam Jamil Al-Amin (formerly H. "Rap" Brown) was transferred to the Federal Supermax prison in Florence, Colorado in August 2007—a prison where the federal government houses its most "dangerous inmates" and is openly referred to as the "domestic Guantanamo." The October 2007 *60 Minutes* piece on the Colorado Supermax, titled "A Cleaner Version of Hell," focused on the security and secrecy of the prison and talked almost completely about the immigrant Muslims who were inside—"The Shoe Bomber" Richard Reid, the supposed twentieth 9/11 hijacker, Zacarias Moussaoui, the convicted "mastermind" of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, Ramzi Youssef, and others. While Imam Jamil was not mentioned, it is important to understand that this transfer (done while an appeal is underway in the State of Georgia) reflects so much of the geographies of power around the Muslim in post-9/11 America.

While Al-Amin's transfer to this prison is no doubt endemic of the state's desires to violently continue the narrative of Black captivity that sits at the heart of the empire, it is also difficult to underestimate the post-9/11 climate and the ways in which, as an African American Muslim, Imam Jamil is viewed as the "homegrown terrorist." Even in the State of Georgia prison system, Imam Jamil was deemed a "high security" captive who was subjected to around-the-clock surveillance and solitary confinement, while his trial and conviction have been called into question by several prominent legal experts and international human rights organizations. Now in the Supermax and under a "behavior modification program," Imam Jamil's history within the Civil Rights Movement (as a member of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee [SNCC]), his Black Power activism and his work as a Muslim leader to thirty-four different urban communities in the United States over several decades embodies the multiple histories and identities that have consistently challenged American militarism, economic injustice, and racism nationally and internationally. During his trial, he was constructed by the state as the embodiment of the "homegrown terrorist," but his is not the case of the captive who becomes "radicalized" in prison but the revolutionary who is imprisoned by the state. His captivity can, in many ways, be seen as a metaphor for the continued attempts by the racial state to rewrite the history of Black radicalism and Third World internationalism over the last fifty years, the sustained attacks on Black community-based leadership, the suppression of political dissent in the United

States, and the increased surveillance on the immigrant, but especially African American Muslim, as the haunting figure within American imperial culture.

While in prison, Al-Amin has completed a manuscript titled *Rap DNA* that extends the legacy of powerful Black political prison writings that narrate a resistance to captivity and transcend the boundary between the free and the unfree— that vicious structuring logic of America that is centered around Black captivity and containment. Like his first book—the vastly overlooked Black Power manifesto *Die Nigger Die!* (1969), which is a brilliant political autobiography and narrative of rebellion—*Rap DNA* is also a stunning act of what Michael Eric Dyson has called "Afrecriture,"[39] a poignant act of the writing of Black presence into history. Written in rhyme form and the embodiment of the talking book, *Rap DNA* is a powerful glimpse into a revolutionary aesthetic that invokes and challenges a range of Black thought within the violent crucible of American slavery, as the opening lines state: "I am the seed of the survivors of the Middle Passage, the harvest from those who could not be broken, would not be broken, never a slave." With this as the opening salvo, *Rap DNA* also explores Fanon, Langston Hughes, Rakim, the murder of Amadou Diallo, critical race theory, his experiences in exile, the Patriot Act, American militarism, the "War on Terror," and an incredible range of ideas through lyricism and irony, insight and wit.

But it is his reclamation of the moniker as "Rap" that is most compelling, as this becomes, in many ways, the voice through which he narrates. This is striking because it suggests an embrace of his multiple identities and histories that so often get overlooked within narratives of conversion that are meant to inaugurate a new ontology of the self and a rejection of one's "slave name." Though not an embrace of Hubert Brown (his former name), the reclaiming of "Rap" works on multiple levels: as an embrace of his persona as the fiery Black Power orator of the past and also an embrace of the *act* of speaking. To "Rap," then, is a radical process that is a scream against the silence imposed by the captive power of the prison. And as indicated by the title of the writings, *Rap DNA* is not only a gesture suggesting that this radical act of speech as "Rap" continues beyond conversion and is imprinted upon his very being, but it also becomes a suggestion that these writings and his history are the ideological blueprint and life line for rap music as well. In fact, throughout the writings he brilliantly challenges contemporary hip-hop artists in rhyme style, battling them on page to use hip-hop as forum for transcendence, redemption, and rebellion, while also laying claim as the father of hip-hop as he says, "if Christian music is alive / It's the only music named after someone besides Rap that survives"[40] and then later where he politicizes the gangster figure when he says, "No gangster rap music/Rap was the gangster of his time."[41]

In a piece called "Conflict Or Conciliation," Al-Amin invokes his history with the American racial state to inform contemporary generations about Black history, referencing how the U.S. Congress ("passed a law named after me, trying to stop the flow of the R-A-P") and the FBI ("for the first time in history of their ten most wanted list . . . changed it to eleven, and before the manhunt could even start, they moved Rap to the top of the chart") sought not only to sanction and criminalize him but also to incarcerate him. In doing so, Al-Amin also critiques the hip-hop generation, writing "Rap became public enemy number one, and I ain't talking about Billboard son,"[42] arguing that material excess and record sales are not tied to Black uplift and transformation but to Black repression and degradation. In Al-Amin's view, rap music should aspire to be at the top of the FBI's charts as a barometer of its Fanonian possibilities, not the music industry's attempts at promoting a commodified rebellion in the form of hip-pop.

Rap DNA also gives eloquent testimony to his life of struggle and his persistent attempts to connect Black radical praxis not within the confines of a collective bourgeois racial identity or a narrow nationalism that edifies white supremacist power but in relationship to a global struggle against the racial and economic legacies of slavery and colonialism. A battle cry from behind enemy lines, titled "Seconds," highlights the painfully enduring question about the role of Blackness within the American imperial project, as he writes, "always talking that we, us, our, my country, our war our team our dream, USA USA how many kids you kill today? Negroes greatest dream? Take one for the team." Al-Amin continues critiquing the complicity of certain forms of Blackness with empire when he writes, "more than willing to kill in a foreign land, women, children another man, Buffalo soldiers like their fathers of old, put the sin of empire on their soul." He powerfully interrogates the historic role of African Americans as imperial citizens who have supported the expansionist project of the United States not only in the distant past, but more recently during the Cold War and in the "War on Terror," when he writes, "give their sons and daughters to spread tyranny and slaughter, in the name of empire's new world order."[43]

As simultaneously Black and Muslim, endemic threat and exogenous insurgent, Jamil Al-Amin's imprisonment links the domestic politics of race with the global terrain of the American warfare state, highlighting the central place that race continues to occupy within the security apparatus around who is to be incarcerated, surveilled, declared war upon, tortured, and killed. And in this time when the euphoria around Barack Obama's election is seen by many as a stamp of legitimacy for the American imperial project, giving the United States both the allure of democracy and the seduction of benevolence, Al-Amin's writings ask a profound question: in this moment where Blackness and American-ness are closer than they ever were, how are Black communities and constituencies, in all their plurality and diversity, going to align themselves in relationship to American empire—as promoters of an imperial Blackness or as critical resisters against it? As Malcolm would say, time will tell.

NOTES

1. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 11–40.
2. Loic Waquant, "From Slavery to Mass Incarceration," *New Left Review* 13 (January–February 2002).
3. Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire In the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 1.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 12.

6. See Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

7. Testimony by Michael P. Downing, Commanding Officer for Counter Terrorism/Criminal Intelligence Bureau, Los Angeles Police Department before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of United States Senate, October 30, 2007.

8. Michael Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books), 14.

9. Alan Gomez, "Resisting Living Death at Marion Federal Penitentiary, 1972," *Radical History Review*, no. 96 (Fall 2006): 60.

10. See the Center for Constitutional Rights at http://www.ccrjustice.org/newsroom/press-releases/judges-dismiss-suit-seeking-damages-guantanamo-torture.

11. Avery Gordon, "Supermax Lockdown," http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=18365.

12. Ibid.

13. Leah Caldwell, "From Supermax to Abu Ghraib," http://www.counterpunch.org/caldwell10152004.html.

14. Gordon, "Supermax Lockdown."

15. Caldwell, "From Supermax to Abu Ghraib."

16. Quoted in Anne-Marie Cusac, "Abu Ghraib, USA," *The Progressive*, August 6, 2004, http://www.alternet.org/story/19479/.

17. Cusac, "Abu Ghraib, USA."

18. Gordon, "Supermax Lockdown."

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Megan Garvey and Richard Winton, "City Declares War on Gangs," *Los Angeles Times*, December 4, 2002, A1.

23. Pamela Hess, "Analysis: Police Take Military Counsel," found at http://lapd.com/article.aspx?a=4150.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. These alarmist rhetorical strategies have a history that date back to the rise of the Nation of Islam, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s as well as during the uprisings in Los Angeles in 1992 when the gang truce was brokered with the help of the Nation of Islam. In addition, the case of Jeff Fort and the El Rukns in the 1980s, an offshoot of the Blackstone Rangers in Chicago, is another prominent case in point.

27. Hess, "Analysis: Police Take Military Counsel."

28. Waquant, "From Slavery to Mass Incarceration."

29. "A Review of the Federal Bureau of Prisons' Selection of Muslim Religious Services Providers," from the Office of the Inspector General, Department of Justice, April 2004.

30. Hess, "Analysis: Police Take Military Counsel."

31. Quoted in "US: Prisons Are Breeding Grounds for Muslim Terrorists" found at www.westernresistance.com/blog/archives/002992.html.

32. Testimony before the World Affair Council of Pittsburgh, "Stopping Terrorists before They Strike: The Justice Departments Power of Prevention," April 16, 2006.

33. "Out of the Shadows: Getting Ahead of Prisoner Radicalization," A Special Report by the George Washington University Homeland Security Policy Institute, 2006, iv.

34. Bill Berkowitz, "American Muslims: A Clear and Present Danger?" http://zmagsite.zmag.org/Jun2003/berkowitz0603.html.

35. Berkowitz, "American Muslims."

36. See Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997) for an excellent history of African American Islam.

37. Personal interview, August 2006.

38. Marvin X and Faruk X, "Islam and Black Art: An Interview With Leroi Jones," *Dictionary of Literary Biography: Black Arts Movement*, ed. Jeff Decker (Detroit: Gale, 1984), 128.

39. Michael Eric Dyson, *Open Mike: Reflections on Philosophy, Race, Sex, Culture and Religion* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2003), 27.

40. Imam Jamil Al-Amin, Rap DNA, unpublished.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.