Introduction

On August 18, 1973, Queen Mother Audley Moore, a stalwart Communist and Pan-Africanist revolutionary, traveled to Green Haven Prison and delivered a remarkable keynote address. A video of the event shows stylishly dressed Black men, women, and children seated in rows of folding chairs, standing in small groups, eating, laughing, talking, and embracing.[1] Were it not for the massive concrete walls encircling the gathering, one might easily mistake it for a typical picnic or celebration. However, the peaceful and bucolic scene belied the profound violence simmering just beneath the surface. The inaugural years of the 1970s were among the most explosive and lethal in US prison history, due in no small measure to militant rebellions that ruptured carceral institutions across the nation. The two-year anniversary of Attica, the most infamous of these conflicts, was less than a month away. Hundreds of "Attica Brothers"—the incarcerated rebels who seized the prison and endured the state-orchestrated massacre that followed—had been transferred to Green Haven, and many now gathered to hear Moore speak.

Standing before a modest podium, Moore explained that Green Haven's imprisoned men were enduring "re-captivity." Offering an analysis made popular by her political mentee Malcolm X, she argued that prison walls made visible a condition of incarceration that is constitutive of Black life in America.[2] Black people are a "captive nation"; the physically imprisoned had therefore been captured "doubly so." Moore then explained that it was not the captives, but the White Man who was

"the real criminal." She reminded her audience—comprised of people variously convicted of robbery, assault, rape, murder, and drug-related crimes—that none of them had ever stolen entire countries, cultures, or peoples, or sold human beings into slavery for profit. Although some of them had tried to imitate the White Man, she continued, they had never *really* stolen and neither had they ever really murdered. "Have you taken mothers and strung them up by their heels?" she asked. "And took your knives and slit their bellies so that their unborn babies can fall to the ground? And then took your heel and crushed those babies into the ground? . . . Have you dropped bombs on people and killed whole countries of people, have you done that brothers?" Given that American empire is constituted through apocalyptic violence and incalculable theft, Moore argued that "crimes" committed by the human spoils of war were necessarily derivative of the organized crime of the state.[3]

Moore explained that as a student of Marcus Garvey and a veteran of the Black liberation struggle since the 1930s, she had accumulated valuable insight into the "science" of white supremacy. With the horror of the Attica massacre fresh in the audience's mind, she told the appalling story of her grandfather's lynching, explaining that prisons function in tandem with other tactics of white patriarchal domination. The aim of the White Man's science was to "denature" African people: to crush their spirits, destroy their cognitive autonomy, and transform them into obedient "negroes" with no knowledge of their history or will to resist. Moore likened this process to the taming of lions, who can be caged and conditioned to "purr like kittens" at the crack of a whip. She concluded her address by enjoining the captive population—the formally imprisoned as well as the nominally free—to reject this oppressive science, to nurture a sovereign Black consciousness, to embrace armed struggle, and to rely on each other for the battles that lay ahead. For only then would the captive nation be able to decisively liberate itself from the prisons ensnaring it.

Queen Mother Moore's unconventional analysis unsettles commonsense notions of crime, violence, imprisonment, the state, politics, science, temporality, and the idea of the human itself. Her narrative method dislodges these concepts from criminology, sociology, anthropology, and other liberal formations of knowledge, repurposing them for Black revolutionary ends. By theorizing Black prisoners as re-captives and situating prisons within the *longue durée* of European colonialism, she forces a reckoning with non-linear, fractured, and cyclical understandings of historical movement.[4] Her visceral rendering of gendered racial violence disrupts past and present attempts to construct the Attica massacre—

during which state actors slaughtered *at least* thirty-nine people and sexually tortured hundreds more—as aberrational or exceptional. Rather, without ever mentioning it directly, she calls attention to the resonance between this recent spectacle of violence and supposedly bygone regimes of chattel slavery, racial apartheid, and settler colonialism. Moreover, her argument that the White Man's allegedly objective "science" involves methods of "taming" Black rebellion is suggestive of concurrent efforts by CIA-affiliated behavioral psychologists, physicians, and others to "neutralize" political radicality by chemically, surgically, and electronically altering brain function.[5] Conveyed during a moment in which the struggle behind the walls was taking on a less combative posture, Moore's oratory challenged the state's authority to criminalize and incarcerate Black communities, while affirming the captives' right, indeed their duty, to struggle against the carceral world. These ideas, thematic concerns, and political imperatives prepare us for the narrative that follows.

Tip of the Spear argues that prisons are war. They are state strategies of race war, class war, colonization, and counterinsurgency. But they are also domains of militant contestation, where captive populations reject these white supremacist systems of power and invent zones of autonomy, freedom, and liberation. The book's major tasks are threefold. One, I analyze what I term the *Long Attica Revolt*, a genealogy of Black radical and revolutionary struggle that emerged among New York's captive population during the early 1970s. Two, I illuminate what I call *prison pacification*, a campaign of racist and political repression, white supremacist science, and organized violence advanced by a network of state actors variously located within penal hierarchies, police agencies, foreign theaters of war, counterinsurgency think tanks, universities, the FBI, and the CIA. Three, I examine how the protracted *collision* of these projects gave rise to new formations of consciousness, politics, sociality, gender, and being, as well as new—which is to say *renewed*—technologies of racial-colonial domination, dehumanization, and extraction.

The war of which I write is fundamentally asymmetrical, not only in terms of each side's capacities and methods, but also in terms of their goals. Through prison pacification, state actors wage a war of conquest on a subject population as part of broader efforts to accumulate capital and preserve the dominance of White Man. Their mode of combat combines siege warfare and counterinsurgency warfare. Through siege warfare, an antagonist surrounds an enemy fortification and institutes blockades on the flow of resources in an attempt to starve the surrounded

population into submission.[6] In this context, *to starve* must be understood capaciously as the calculated denial of the material, social, cultural, and political nutrients necessary for reproducing defiant Black life and consciousness across generations. Counterinsurgency, according to the US Army, is a style of warfare that involves "military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency."[7] As will become clear, the planners and administrators of this carceral siege aimed to crush the Revolt by deploying a range of techniques, both "hard" and "soft," across these terrains of intervention.

In contrast to this carceral warfare project, the Long Attica Revolt was not a war of conquest or accumulation. Against carceral siege, revolting captives waged a people's war, a counter-war, or what exiled Black revolutionary Robert F. Williams called "a guerrilla war of self-defense."[8] Popularly characterized as "a war of the weak against the strong," guerrilla warfare involves irregular, small-scale attacks that aim to disrupt the social order, raising the cost of business as usual to a level that is unsustainable for the ruling authority, forcing them to relinquish control. Within and against captivity, rebels employed diverse methodologies of attack: political education, critique, protest, organizing, cultural production, litigation, subversion, refusal, rebellion, retaliation, hostage-taking, sabotage, armed struggle, and the intimate labor of care.[9] Like Moore, they saw prison walls not as boundaries between freedom and unfreedom, but as material demarcations of different intensities of captivity, vulnerability, and rebellion.

Attica was, and is, a multiracial structure of Revolt led by people who self-identified as Black. However, the Blackness they claimed was as much, if not more, a collective *political* designation as an individual identity. Through this rubric, Black skin is insufficient for Blackness, as Moore's derision for Black-skinned "negroes" makes clear. For decades, combatant-theorists and politically engaged academics have conceptualized political Blackness as a mode of consciousness emerging from a collective historical experience of oppression and struggle.[10] Attica erupted out of this context, a historical moment in which people whose African ancestors were enslaved in what became known as Latin America increasingly embraced their African heritage.[11] Moreover, conditions of extreme carceral duress coerced some imprisoned and destitute whites into Black modalities of rebellion: "Authority itself may be going down a fast track toward the Niggerization of everyone," explained a white Attica survivor.[12] Forged within cauldrons of racial, sexual, and

class oppression, the Long Attica Revolt threatened the existence of prisons, the social order, and the very coherence of White Man, a coercively universalized paradigm of human being.[13]

Contrary to most academic scholarship on prison-based movements and rebellions, *Tip of the Spear* decenters incarcerated peoples' formal demands to improve prison conditions. Though struggles over access to decent food, clothing, shelter, medical care, visitation privileges, humane parole policies, and so on are an important site of political contestation, these appeals constitute the prison movement's *minimum demands:* calls for bare survival amid genocide.[14] Investigations of prison insurgency tend to focus on this rational and pragmatic class of demands, while ignoring, dismissing, or downplaying calls to "tear down the walls" and "free all political prisoners" as unrealistic, hyperbolic, immature, or too extreme. Moreover, as Dylan Rodríguez has shown, even these minimum demands, which tend to be articulated in the form of the petition to the state, are routinely analyzed in unsophisticated ways that circumscribe the horizon of incarcerated people's ambitions to a desire for full incorporation within existing regimes of citizenship, rights, and humanity.[15] I am not arguing against the common refrain that incarcerated people *just want to be treated as human beings*. In many cases this is certainly true, but in others, it is the conception of the human itself that is seen as the problem.[16] As the dominant way of interpreting anticarceral struggle, the focus on external demands on the state narrows the scope of people's actual desires and facilitates the mystification of prison abolition's revolutionary and anticolonial origins.

Tip of the Spear argues that the Long Attica Revolt was itself a demand. Uttered through what Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. famously termed "the language of the unheard,"[17] this riot, this rebellion, this revolutionary upheaval was an *internal* demand, a call to arms directed not toward the state, which did not have the capacity to comprehend or satiate the rebellion's most fulsome desires, but toward allied communities across prison walls and beyond US territorial boundaries. The content of this maximum demand was the abolition of prisons, the abolition of war, the abolition of racial capitalism, the abolition of White Man, and the emergence of new modes of social life not predicated on enclosure, extraction, domination, or dehumanization. In the pages that follow, I carefully excavate incarcerated people's protracted and often fatal struggles to realize their most unruly, unreasonable, and irrational demands. In doing so, I reframe our understanding of Attica and Black rebellion more broadly.

At the tail end of our conversation, Che Nieves, the former Minister of Education for a prison-based formation of the Young Lords Party and a veteran of the Attica rebellion, articulated a version of the maximum demand with rare clarity. We had covered the highs and lows of his life of struggle behind the walls: the relentless brutality of prison existence, the trajectory of his political radicalization, the ecstasy of achieving the rebellion's illegal freedom, and the unspeakable horrors of the massacre he survived. Like most of the interviews I conducted while researching this book, it was a heavy discussion that was filled with rage, tears, laughter, and the wonderment that surfaces when someone rediscovers a lost thread of memory that had lain dormant for decades. As we prepared to go our separate ways, I thanked Che for entrusting me with his memories and analysis. He responded: "Listen, all I could say is, we brothers, man. We need each other. It's not only me, but you. That's what keeps us going. Exchange, it keeps the spirit going, and it keeps us moving toward freedom. The more you acquire, the more I acquire. And without you, it's not me. You make me and I make you."[18]

Che's poetic reflection illuminates the abolitionist ethical philosophy at the core of the Revolt. Though immediately triggered by carceral repression and violence, Attica signifies a positive demand that exceeds normative frameworks of the political and challenges hegemonic norms of individualism that are at the heart of capitalism, patriarchy, and white Western humanism. Decades before the term entered the popular lexicon, where it has been diluted and co-opted, Attica rebels engaged in a praxis of abolition, generating abolitionist knowledge, theory, and practice amid conditions of carceral war. They not only imagined and dreamed a world without prisons, but put their bodies and lives on the line to materialize their vision in the face of determined opposition. The shape of the world they began to build in place of what they began to tear down was not predetermined. Rather, it was improvised through the unfolding of the Revolt, a collective movement toward freedom. Theirs was a freedom that was not only material and political, but cognitive and metaphysical, a freedom nurtured within and between people who came to understand themselves as new kinds of beings for a new kind of world, a freedom that could not be granted, that could only be seized. The Long Attica Revolt, in other words, *is* abolition. It is a paradigm and a blueprint, imperfect to be sure, but invaluable nonetheless, for creating an abolitionist world.

Che's assertion that the power of our principled brotherhood exceeds the sum of its parts points to another major theme of this book: man-

hood, masculinity, patriarchy, and gendered life under domestic warfare. *Tip of the Spear* focuses on struggles enacted by people incarcerated in prisons designated for men, who by and large understood incarceration as a process that attacked their manhood, and who engaged in rebellion as a humanizing and indeed a masculinizing process.[19] As such, it analyzes the complex ways that claims to manhood are constructed, contested, and violently negated in the process of struggle, and shows that the content of the manhood proclaimed by the rebels was radically different from that enacted by their captors. Across years of learning with and from progressive, radical, and revolutionary Black men who rebelled within and against the racist and patriarchal state, I have learned that a gendered struggle, a struggle to redefine manhood itself, to create an ethical and life-giving manhood, was (and is) indispensable to this Revolt.[20]

MAKING THIS BOOK

Tip of the Spear is my response to an intergenerational assignment that Eddie Ellis and others gave me nearly a decade ago. I met Ellis in 2009 while facilitating political education workshops with the Prison Moratorium Project, an organization he helped establish after spending twenty-three years behind the walls. In 2014, when I began conducting research for what evolved into this book, I interviewed Eddie, hoping to learn about his life as a journalist for the magazine *The Liberator*, his role in the Harlem Black Panther Party, his experience in Attica during the rebellion, and his work as part of the Green Haven Think Tank, a prison-based formation whose research influenced multiple generations of activists, scholars, and policymakers, often in unacknowledged ways.[21] During our interview, which lasted upward of six hours, Eddie shared his feeling that he and those with whom he was in community had failed to theorize, document, and contextualize the movements they led behind prison walls. "We have never been able to use the tools of academia to demonstrate that our analysis is a better analysis," he said.[22] He then suggested that perhaps I could play that role, that I make it my mission to use the resources of academic scholarship to rigorously elaborate a genealogy of knowledge production that today largely remains criminalized, pathologized, and intentionally hidden from public view. It was a transformative interview in many ways, but unfortunately it was our last. Ellis died of cancer shortly after that conversation.

The arguments and narratives that follow are the result of intensive research in institutional and personal archival collections combined

with repeated, extended, and open-ended oral history interviews I conducted with more than sixty people, most of them Black and Latinx men and women who participated in radical social movements within and beyond prisons between the 1960s and the 1990s. As such, this work extends a legacy of anthropological research carried out in service of anticolonial, liberatory, and abolitionist projects.[23] It operationalizes scholar Michel-Rolph Trouillot's insight that non-academics are critical producers of historiography: that not only do such subjects engage in concrete struggle to transform material reality, they also strive to "define the very terms under which some situations can be described."[24] It also builds on the work of theorist Cedric Robinson, who shows us that to contend with Black radicalism on its own terms, we must unshackle our analytical frameworks from the cognitive prison of (white) Western rationality and refuse to impose knowledge paradigms developed to justify the current social order upon movements that aim to unmake that order.[25] Generated by deep and long-term relationships of trust, my analytical method takes the Black radical epistemologies, narratives, and modes of argumentation of those with whom I am in community as both a point of departure and lodestar. Moreover, it employs an ethnographic approach to historical narration in which I, the reflexive authorial subject, remain present in the story, thinking and theorizing with the protagonists of this struggle to collectively scrutinize the meanings of key ideas, decisions, tensions, and events.[26]

It is this relation of accountability to the intellectuals and combatants of this undeclared war, both living and dead, and to the ancestral traditions that nurtured them, that distinguishes this book from previous treatments of Attica and from the growing body of academic scholarship on Black radicalism within and beyond prisons.[27] The dominant understanding of Attica as a four-day event that was confined to a single prison and primarily aimed to ameliorate oppressive conditions is facilitated by interpretive practices that prioritize knowledge yielded by state sources over knowledge produced and archived by rebels.[28] In contrast to the imperatives of this counterinsurgent historiography, Black radical ways of knowing constitute the primary sources of this study. To gather these sources I have pursued, excavated, and analyzed the recollections, letters, treatises, manuals, journalism, testimony, and even the rumors, legends, and "conspiracy theories" generated by people who understood themselves, and were understood by the state, to be revolutionaries.[29]

The Long Attica Revolt names a protracted accumulation of rebellion that circulated within and beyond New York prisons for at least