

THE
VIEW
FROM

THE END OF THE WORLD

Live interviews of life in prison with JAMES CARR by Isaac Cronin and Dan Hammer



FOLKWAYS RECORDS FD 5404

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SIDE I

James Carr, one of the most notorious convict rebels in the California prison system, was gunned down outside his San Jose, California, home in April, 1972, just 31 months after his last release from jail. Before he died, Carr was able to record and edit 26 hours of tapes which formed the basis of his autobiography, BAD, and from which this record is taken.

What you're about to hear are three incidents which took place at San Quentin and Soledad prisons in the early 1960's, followed by Jimmy's general perspective of what it's like to be at the end of the world, San Quentin. These selections give us a good idea not only of Jimmy's development, but of some of the early gropings toward social consciousness among prisoners.

The first convict groups can in no way be considered revolutionary or political--they were barely social at all. Black prisoners in particular in the 1950's were considered, and thought of themselves, as freaks--isolated deviants whose isolation was constantly reinforced and aggravated by the authorities, who sought to pit each con against all. The groups which evolved in an effort to break this paranoid criminal individualism were little more than racial gangs which fought each other and the authorities in order to gain control of the prison rackets (gambling, bootlegging, drugs and prostitution) and to insure their members' personal survival.

The Black Muslims were the first organization to try to place the prisoner in his larger social context. Though cons such as Jimmy as his partner, George Jackson, rejected the Muslims' ideology and their essentially passive tactics, the Muslims' preaching got them to look outside the walls, and their dauntless courage inspired all black and rebellious cons.

Here Jimmy describes two incidents involving Muslim leaders which he witnessed when he was a 16-year-old juvenile illegally incarcerated at San Quentin.

SIDE II BAND 1

The Wolf Pack, a black gang started by George Jackson, Jimmy Carr and a few close friends at Tracy when they were all teenagers, formed the basis for all militant black groups in the California prisons after the Muslims. The following story is from the Pack's younger days--at Soledad in 1960--and shows how dangerous the prison officials considered a few brash black kids having fun.

SIDE II BAND 2

After a round of "bus therapy," being shuttled around the state while the authorities tried to figure out what to do with him, Jimmy was sent back to San Quentin. What follows is his overview of how a rebel convict feels in that giant man-trap at the end of the world.



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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

Library of Congress Catalogue Card No. 75-750767

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Excerpts from Text by "BAD", Autobiography of James Carr published by Herman Gras, N.Y.

SIDE I

James Carr, one of the most notorious convict rebels in the California prison system, was gunned down outside his San Jose, California, home in April, 1972, just 3½ months after his last release from jail. Before he died, Carr was able to record and edit 26 hours of tapes which formed the basis of his autobiography, BAD, and from which this record is taken.

What you're about to hear are three incidents which took place at San Quentin and Soledad prisons in the early 1960's, followed by Jimmy's general perspective of what it's like to be at the end of the world, San Quentin. These selections give us a good idea not only of Jimmy's development, but of some of the early gropings toward social consciousness among prisoners.

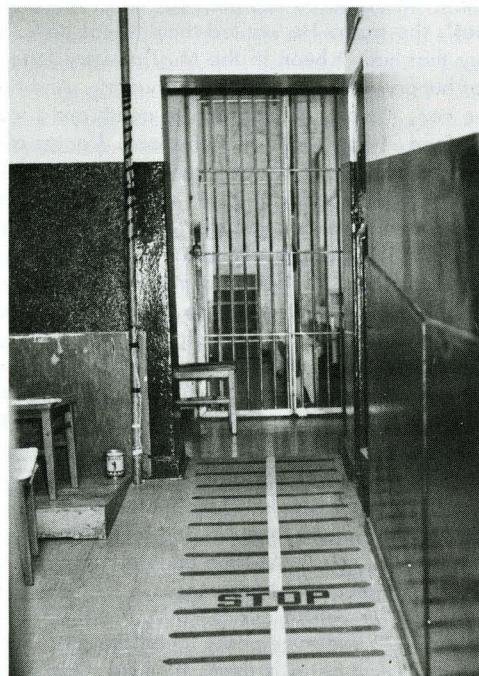
The first convict groups can in no way be considered revolutionary or political—they were barely social at all. Black prisoners in particular in the 1950's were considered, and thought of themselves, as freaks—isolated deviants whose isolation was constantly reinforced and aggravated by the authorities, who sought to pit each con against all. The groups which evolved in an effort to break this paranoid criminal individualism were little more than racial gangs which fought each other and the authorities in order to gain control of the prison rackets (gambling, bootlegging, drugs and prostitution) and to insure their members' personal survival.

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Here Jimmy describes two incidents involving Muslim leaders which he witnessed when he was a 16-year-old juvenile illegally incarcerated at San Quentin.

So when I get to the hole all these Muslims are in the hole. So when I come up they put me in the cell, right? And I'm sitting there and I don't know anybody and I hear these dudes talking about Allah. I never even heard this so I'm trying to think, "What the fuck these guys are talking about?" All these theories and shit that they have, you know, about how white people were created and black people supposed to have two genes and this whole trip, you know. And I'm listening to this shit and I don't know what it is. I didn't know what a

gene was. And this dude, Lamar Rivers, who was the protagonist in all this shit, because he's got the biggest mouth. He knows his ideology, I mean the pseudo-ideology of the Black Muslims better than anyone else, so he just runs this shit all until the wee hours of the night, you know, in the early morning and he's still going. To describe him, he was like about, he was like the guy on Hills Brothers Coffee, right? (laughter) That's my best description of him. I've always said that. The guy on Hills Brothers Coffee is about 6'6", just skinny as can be because he fasts all the time and he talks like one of those mumbo-jumbos, like he knows the truth, you know. As if everything he says is prophetic, you know. It's a gift of prophecy. The dude is really just too fucking much. He calls over to my cell and he says, "Hey." But if I had listened to him, I would have been rich. That's one thing, I always look back at that dude. He calls over and he starts talking to me so I tell him, say, "Where are you coming from?" and he says, "It's unconstitutional for you to be here. You file a writ when you get out of here and sue them. You can sue them for putting you here, because they're not supposed to put juvenile offenders in prison." And I just kind of listened to him and I don't want any of that shit, you know, it didn't mean nothing to me. So then he tells me, he says, "Have you ever heard of the word of the messenger?" And I says, "What messenger are you talking about?" He says he's talking about Elijah Mohammed and I tell him, "Nope." He tells me, "Do you eat pork?" and I say yeah and he tells me, "You shouldn't eat pork. It stagnates your brain," and all this stuff and it kills you and it has worms. He takes me on this big trip and he starts trying to convert me. They give pork every day there. That's all they give up there in the hole, is pork - pork and cheese sandwiches. The Muslims had been fasting ever since they had been up there. Fifteen days and they still hadn't eaten, right? And they're really hungry and all of them refuse to eat unless they bring them some food that they can eat, ok? That corresponds with their religion, right? In the meantime I'm eating graciously, because they're fasting and I'm taking all the food. So Nelson at the time was associate superintendent. He wasn't the warden like he is now. They called



him "Red Nelson" 'cause he's a fool. Red hair, red neck, mothafucka, you understand? He had given an order that nothing would be served there but pork and mush, right? And even the salad had pork cut up in it. That's no bullshit, that's the truth. He wanted them to eat pork. There was one guy that hadn't been in the Muslims very long and he just got hungry, the guy was really hungry. And he just asked the cop, "Look, I'm starving to death and I want some fucking food. I can't take this anymore. I gotta come off this." So, the cop goes and calls Red Nelson. Red Nelson comes up to the hole personally. At the time the hole was up on death row. One side was death row and the other side was the hole. You could talk to the guys in death row through the ventilator. So Nelson comes up that afternoon and he tells them, he says, "Are you hungry?" and he says, "Yeah, I'm hungry." He had some pig feet and some ham hocks and beans that they had boiled up. They took him out front, took him out of the cell, and gave him a fork and a plate and told him to dig in. He stood there and he ate the pig feet and the hog and shit and came back. And when he came back (they let him eat around the corner)...and they bring him back and so Nelson tells him, he says, he got all these cops with him and shotguns and shit, "Tell them what you had to eat, boy." And the dude is really shamed that he got weak and ate. And Nelson says, "Tell them what you had to eat." And so Lamar Rivers said, "What did you have to eat?" He says, "I had some pork." Nelson says, "Tell them what it was." And he tells them, he says, "Pig feet and some ham hocks and some beans." And Nelson tells him, "Now get in your cell. If any of the rest of you want to eat, there's plenty left." He's a dog motherfucker. He's really a dog. I'm just sitting there and I'm looking at this mother and I'm saying, "Boy, this a dog motherfucker here." And he's just grinning. So he leaves and Lamar just starts preaching, "Ah, that motherfucker. Allah will get him and run him off the planet." So they take Lamar to the disciplinary committee. Nelson's sitting in there. And Lamar is a fanatic. He's like this, you know, real tense, hypertense. He tells them, he says, "Beasts, you're the beasts." And he jumps up on the table and kicks Nelson in the mouth and they're dragging, the police are dragging him out of Nelson's office and he's kicking and hollering and shit, you know, a madman. So they take him and they send him to Vacaville and give him shock treatment. Then he forgot all about Allah.

Booker was this guy who had the leadership ability, right, he could sway a lot of people in his direction. And he was converting like, I guess every month he was converting maybe ten. Muslims, right. He would convert at least maybe ten to fifteen dudes to Islam, right? The blacks were coming in, as a matter of fact quite a few blacks were coming in to San Quentin at this time. Right around '61. So he was constantly being harassed. They were constantly tearing his cell up, constantly catching him on the yard, shaking him down, fucking with him and everything else and threatening him. But he continues to preach this stuff, right? So finally they put him and Lamar Rivers and a lot of other Muslims over in the Adjustment Center. And after they get them in the Adjustment Center he continues to preach this stuff. And every day they'd go out on the yard, they'd have their little meetings over in the corner, the Muslims. You know there was quite a few Nazis also in there. But there was no conflict between the Nazis and Muslims. They just both of them seemed to believe in the same thing, in a way, you know? One believed in white supremacy and one in black supremacy. One found a justification in his belief in that the other one believed the way that he did. And so they, kind of, more or less, got along pretty well. They didn't associate, but it was understood that they didn't like one another so they just stayed away from each other. Captain Hopper wasn't satisfied

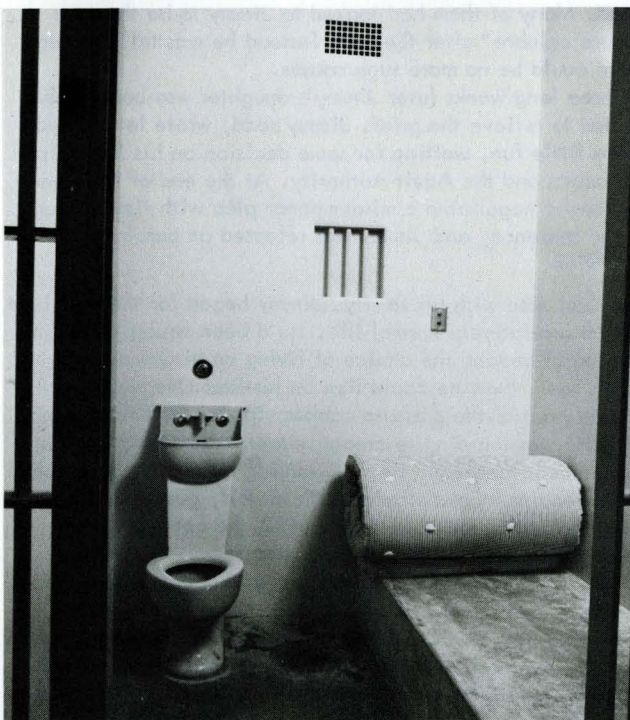
with that, him and Red Nelson. They wanted to get rid of Booker because Booker was causing them a lot of problems. So they upped and called a couple of these Nazis out and tell them, they said, "Look man." The reason we know this is true is because the Nazis told it later on. They said, "Look. We want to get rid of this dude, Booker, and if you guys go out and start a fight with the Muslims on the yard, we're going to reach down and shoot him. All around the Adjustment Center yard are these tall buildings and the guards can hide up there with rifles and shit if they want to. So the Nazis go for this thing, right? They start a fight with the Muslims and they get to fighting out there and as soon as they start fighting they start backing up, right? And as soon as they did that they shot this dude Booker right in the head and murdered him. It's just another example of how they sit around there, murdering people at will. If they want to kill somebody, they just kill them. They just need very little excuse to do it. And most of the time when they function that's the way it is. They want an excuse for moving. They won't just come and shoot you. They'll set it up and then they'll murder you. Anyway they murdered this guy Booker and I just wanted to get that on the tape. 12:00

SIDE II BAND 1

The Wolf Pack, a black gang started by George Jackson, Jimmy Carr and a few close friends at Tracy when they were all teenagers, formed the basis for all militant black groups in the California prisons after the Muslims. The following story is from the Pack's younger days--at Soledad in 1960--and shows how dangerous the prison officials considered a few brash black kids having fun.

So Jake says, "Look, man, let's just go on in and take the whole wing over." We don't know if he's really serious or not, but we all say yeah. So we step off in there and the next thing we know, he's laid the police out, knocks the police out and takes the police keys. And drags the police out of the wing into the hall. And then takes, and locks the door. He gets the keys to the door, but he doesn't get the keys to the locks to the cells and all the cells are locked. So about that time, this police here, when he gets up he runs down the hall to control and he comes back with around about 20 police. And the police look off in there. We're in there tearing up all the tables, making, getting the table legs - they got big pretty table legs. You can fight good with them. We were tearing all the tables up and when the police look off in there and it's a sergeant and a lieutenant and they look and they say, "These motherfuckers are crazy." So they open the door and walk right in and the lieutenant says, "What's going on in here?" So we says, "Not a motherfucking thing. What you all want to do? You all feel like fighting?" Because the week before they fought the Mexicans. So we figured, well, if they fought the Mexicans they'd fight us, but I was the littlest one in the pack down there, you know what I'm saying. They wasn't going to go in there and fight us when we had those table legs and shit. They didn't have any guns at that moment, but they went and got some. So the lieutenant says, "You guys are going to have to come out of this wing, here." So we say, "We have no intentions of leaving this wing, we're holding this down. If you want us out, you have to move us." He says, "Well, I'll move you." So Jake walks over to him and says, "You what?" He says, "I'll move..." and Jake slapped him, slaps the lieutenant right in the mouth. The lieutenant is hurting gracious in the mouth and his pride is hurt, but he's not going to dare try and fight back. So Jake tells them, he says, "Get out, all of you. You're nothing but a bunch of punks noway. We taking this over." So they go out and they lock the door. They're gonna win. They always do. So they

go out into the hall and they go tell the captain and all them about it. So the captain calls down there and Black calls down on the phone. So this dude, Smitty, who is a fake Muslim, picks the phone up and he says, "Yup." And the man says something to him and he says, "Fuck you, you motherfucker." And he smashes the phone off the wall. So about that time here comes the superintendent - the warden - they call him the superintendent. So he comes down there and he says, "You guys gonna come out of there or are we going to have to come in and get you?" So we said, "You're gonna have to come in and get us. We just refuse to come out." In the meantime we just demolished. We tore the television out, we break the windows out and all that shit. So, pretty soon I look up on the second tier and there's like - the second tier has a roof that comes to it and I look up there and I see about three people up there pointing down in there. And then I see them reach up with a riot gun and start breaking the glass out. And so, we've been shot at with gas a thousand times, you know gas ain't shit. We say, oh, they're just going to shoot some gas at us. So they shoot some canisters of gas in there. All gas does is go up and it gets all the guys in the cells up there, but it doesn't get us. We're just down there laughing at them, waiting for them to come in. We figure they're going to shoot gas and then they're going to all get together and then they're going to run in. But it didn't work like that because they had no intentions on coming in there and fighting. About a half an hour later they come up with rifles - and they keep pointing at me and I didn't know at the time why they were pointing at me, but they were pointing at me because I was a juvenile and they didn't want to shoot me. And they kept, like the dude said, he called in with that little horn - a little portable public address system - a little portable speaker - and he says, "You guys got one other chance to come out of there." So Jake starts hollering about "We're not coming out. If you want us come in and get us. Fuck you in the ass," and all this shit. So the man tells him, he says, "Well, Louis, if you want to stay in, that's your prerogative. But why don't you let (me and this dude Smitty) Smitty and Carr out?" Jake said, "If they want out they can come out. Do you-all want to get out?" And we told the man to fuck his



motherfucking self, we didn't want out, right? And if we'd have left they'd have killed those dudes. We didn't know it. Next thing we know the dudes are coming up with these motherfucking 30-30's and these... (unclear)..., right? They stick them in through the window and start leveling off and they start shooting at the walls and shit. When they do this here we grab those tables and these tables are these big wooden tables, but the bottom part is steel, and they got this big piece of sheet metal in the center of it - the part where it sits up on - is connected to, so it's a big old piece of sheet metal. So we turned the tables, like, on their sides and put them down at the end of the wing and get up under them for shields. And those motherfuckers just cut loose with a volley of shit. Bullets was going on the fucking floor and shit, man. And things got mighty hot down there, right? So when it gets hot like that we start pushing these tables back up toward the line of fire where we can get up next to the television room or get into the shower where there's no clear line to shoot at you from that position. So we get up there close - most of us run in the shower, right? But the man down in the corridor opens the front door up to the wing. Tip and Bull and Harper and Maurice, all of them except for Jake, George, Smitty and myself, run right out the door. They don't want no more of it, you know what I mean? It was too hot in there for them. And Jake jumped up and started hollering because he didn't think they'd run and he started hollering about, "Come back, you motherfuckers, don't run out." He was really upset, you know. 'Cause he still thought that they was going to come in there and fight, but they had no intentions on it. So we're held up in the shower. We stayed in that shower for about six - about six hours. And they shot every piece of tile. We were all bruised up and had cuts and shit, but none of us got shot. But they shot every - right, they were shooting at an angle, see that's the thing. They shot damn near every piece of tile out in the shower off of it. The wall looked like it was rough finished concrete when they got through, right? Big old stacks of cement all over the motherfucking floor. We're in there up under the bench - the bench is where you sit down and take your clothes off and shit or dry yourself off - and we're up under those, grouped up in a tight knot, you know what I mean, and bullets are just zinging. But they shoot and then they talk and then they shoot again. Then they bring the National Guard in and the National Guard - they are true dogs. They stick shotguns off into the shower windows and shit until... How many National Guard? I don't know. They never came inside. They came inside of the prison but they never came inside of the building, they were outside the building, surrounding it like we were going to break out or something - isn't that a bitch? So, they shoot, these shotguns are shooting into the shower windows and they say, "If you don't come out of there we're just going to shoot these shotguns in every damn direction." So, we get out from under the benches and we walk out of the shower into the direct line of fire where they got the rifles at. So we're standing there and Jake says, "We just oughta just have these motherfuckers execute us right here." And so I don't say nothing and Smitty says, "I don't believe this is the way to die. Our lives ain't intended to be like this," and Jake says, "Shut up." He went mad, he said, "Shut up. Ain't no motherfucking Allah. Close your motherfucking mouth. We're going to have a vote here." And so he tells George, he says, "What do you think?" And so George turns and says, "Frankly speaking, I'm ready to leave." He says, "But if you decide on staying, I'll stay with you." He said, "What do you say?" And I say, "I feel the same way. If you want to be executed, I'll be executed with you, so it's up to you." We put all the burden on him. He turns to Smitty and he says, "You don't have no vote." So he says,

"We're going on out. Fuck it. We're going out." So he tells the man, "All right, punk, we're coming out." He was disrespectful right to the end. So the man says, "Turn around with your hands behind your head and back out the door." So we say alright and we get in a line and we all have our backs toward them and we all run out, right - we turned around and we run out the door. And we start fighting them. (laughter) 'Cause, I mean, we at least got to do some fighting. We went through all that shit for nothing? All day for a fight and we couldn't get one. That's all we really wanted to do - was just a good fight. 11:00

SIDE II BAND 2

After a round of "bus therapy," being shuttled around the state while the authorities tried to figure out what to do with him, Jimmy was sent back to San Quentin. What follows is his overview of how a rebel convict feels in that giant man-trap at the end of the world.

Yeah, some people had this philosophy of doing their own time, but in a place like San Quentin that becomes very complicated, because to do your own time means not to get involved in any of the things that are going on. Most of the time when a dude gets killed he doesn't belong to a group. He gets singled out. A lot of times when antagonistic groups are after each other and it breaks down along racial lines then it becomes very irrational and so what happens if a guy is in a particular group it doesn't mean that they're going to go get that guy from a group since it's a racial thing, it has racial connotations to it - is that they can get anybody as long as he's black or he's white or whatever, you know, whoever the aggressors going to be. If, for instance, the Nazis stab some black cat and the dominant black group within the black population decides to take steps against it, you know, retaliation - well then they might just up and catch the first white dude they see and he may not even be a Nazi. He may not have nothing to do with this shit that's been going on and even care anything about it. All he wants to do is do his time and get the fuck out - he gets ripped off, right? Because he's the most vulnerable because he doesn't have anybody helping him. So he becomes the most vulnerable, so he gets ripped off. And vice versa. And this is the way a lot of deaths go down. And so a lot of times when you hear about some dude getting killed and they're trying to find a motive for it - well they can't find a motive, really, other than it was just purely a racial thing. This guy just happened to be black or white or whatever as the case may have been. He just happened to be the nearest, most available thing to kill - the most convenient thing. And so it's done and so he loses a life for just - all of them lose their lives for nothing, because none of that shit is worth killing anybody over - it's just a bunch of shit. But it still happens. So the atmosphere there was just really tense. And what was happening was just like every other riot - the whites would win a riot and then the blacks would win one. And it just went that way and it was never like - as far as the victories were concerned they were all like - nothing was a linear victory - it was always like a hit and a loss. They wait for retaliation, you know. If a black group hit a white, then after they did that they were satisfied until someone hit a black. Then they became dissatisfied. And whoever got off the ground first was the one that won. It was always like that - because it was always set up dirty. I mean it was just never any of that shit about loyalty or rules of war - that's all dead. You catch a dude on the toilet - all the better. What they call it now is "stealing people," you know what I mean? A dude gets his life stole because he's walking and he knows nothing and the

next thing - he's dead. He doesn't have any idea he has an enemy or anything and he just gets ripped off. The concept behind "doing your own time" - and the guards are always coming out with this philosophy about "do your own number. You're the only one who has a picture on your I.D. card, when you came in you were given a picture with a number and all this shit and you have no one else, you're not accountable to anybody so you don't have to participate in any of this shit - just do your own number." But that's really easy for them to say. It's hard for a dude to do when he's caught up in that kind of crux. It's a very complicated thing to do "do your own number" when all that shit's going on. And there's been cases in these groups where guys have come in - like say a dude comes from Reception Guidance Center at Chino - and knows nothing about San Quentin - never been there, knows no one there at all. Comes in and just because he's a fish some dude kills him because he happens to be white or black. So they'd be able to say, "Well, we killed a white guy or we killed a black guy." So, you know, what they say, "we're out of the red" or "back up to even kill" or "one up" or "two up" or whatever. "We got so many feathers in our hat and they got to catch up." It's just an exchange, man. And the real true dogs of this shit, the real agitators of it, just seemingly never get ripped off. They're always around to kick-off another session of this shit. It just keeps the situation tight. And consequently it was hard to do anything together as far as strikes were concerned. Hawker, who is a racist son-of-a-bitch and a fascist to boot, which enables him to overcome his racism in times of need (laughter) - the son-of-a-bitch. He takes a strike - Mexicans and whites and blacks have got together and got their heads together to kick a strike off because under all this antagonism and war and shit they all understand that they're all there together. And every now and then - in moments of truth - existential moments or whatever they are - you can hear them say, "I know that our real enemy is - are the pigs and if we're actually going to make things better for ourselves we're going to have to get together to do it because we can't do it alone." And they'll get on this kick and each time some way or another the cops start the rumors. They'll draw some dude over and tell him, "We hear about them blacks going to do this - talking about getting all the white guys at the movie this weekend." And then they'll call some black dude in and tell him some shit and they'll call some Mexican in and tell him. Invariably, what they tell a Mexican is the same thing they tell the white and generally the Mexicans go with the whites. And so the blacks end up fighting the Mexicans and the whites. So a good food strike or a good work strike gets turned into a good race war and the authorities all laugh, you know. And they keep that organized thing down. Just the whole movement for organized labor within the pen gets constantly defeated, every fucking time by the racist, fascist methods - every fucking time they're successful. They always end up turning them into some kind of shit. The only successful strikes that they've ever had were at Folsom. Where the racial thing is just always shut way into the background because the contradiction at Folsom is just so grievous - so blatantly apparent that everyone knows who the enemy is and they have their backs so far against the wall there, at Folsom, because just the idea of fighting amongst each other on a racial basis is just ridiculous. At Folsom are the last true convicts, that really understand that they are convicts as a class and that prison guards are the enemy and the establishment in Sacramento are the motherfucking primary source of all their grievances and not each other. But, anyway, back to Quentin, it was just so fucking - at Quentin you lived a day at a time, like George talks about in his book, "I live a moment at a time or a day at a time," because that's the way that you live, because

the idea of tomorrow is a very nebulous thing. It's something that you don't even think about. You don't think, "Well, tomorrow, I'm going to do this and..." Because tomorrow doesn't mean any more than today and so you just have a tendency to - like you say you have an ideal tomorrow but as far as - you live one day at a time and if you get to tomorrow - well, that's fine - you'll deal with tomorrow when you get there but as far as planning ahead - it's just ridiculous. And the idea of talking about - well, you know what I'm going to do so much good time until I can get out in so many years - is just the hardest thing to even concoct in your mind, man. Because all these motherfucking dudes are getting ripped off. If you don't get ripped off the chances of you compounding your time are just about 99 9/10%. Because all you have to do is get involved with these groups and that's more time. And then if you get caught with a knife - that's five to life. If you kill somebody - it's death row. So, you grow to understand and accept all this shit. It's just the reality of the day. And so you accept it. Then your philosophy becomes one of - you become a complete nihilist in a way - you think that when you get out - well, if I get out it will be like this - but you never actually think in concrete terms about getting out. You only think about existing there. And so your philosophy changes and you say, well, what has to happen, since this is a Vietnam - we'll deal with it right here. And this is our Vietnam here and so we can't be thinking about what we're going to do when we get to the streets, even though we have an idea of what it will be like if we do get out. And that's the way it goes - it seems like - I don't know if you ever felt like it - it's something like reaching the end of the world. There's so many cats that - I've walked with a lot of dudes on the yard and they've all said, "You feel like you're at the end of the world." And

everybody will say, "Yeah, that's just the way I feel all the time." Like there's no tomorrow. This is it. You can go not a step farther. In other words, conditions can get no worse than this, you know. The worse conditions could get other than that is they just upped it and just start shooting and shot you down like you were a dog. It's just that simple. There's nothing else. What else can they do? Beat your ass? They've done that - they've done every motherfucking thing in the book but kill you. You really don't give a fuck anymore, in other words. And you even get to the point where you don't care whether or not you get out. All you care about is staying alive. You live to stay alive - in order to stay alive. And once you get involved in a group you can't get out. You can't get out. You're in - you're in for life and it's just that simple. There's no getting in and then you're going to check out. Because - for a number of reasons. First of all you have to think about the group. If you get out what's the group going to say about it? They might want to rip you off, right? If anything they're going to definitely blackball the fuck out of you, right. Then number two. If you've been participating with a particular group against other groups and you get out of the group and these other people in these other groups know you're not with the group anymore - they'll kill you, because they've been wanting to kill you anyway. And so once you're in - you're in - for life. And that's why you got the oath of Ulysses and you can't break the oath because you're in and if you break the oath then you're good as dead. One way or another you're going to die - sooner or later. And if you stay in jail you're going to die because it'll catch up with you and you can't hide. They say, "You can't run, you can't hide - there's no place to go." Where you going to run to? Death row?



BIOGRAPHY

James Carr was born in Oklahoma in 1943. He soon moved to the housing projects in East Los Angeles with his mother, grandmother and a few aunts and uncles. When he was nine years old he burned down his elementary school. He spent the next eight years in and out of foster homes, juvenile hall and California youth authority camps, pulling robberies of all kinds in between and winding up at Devil Vocational Institution (a medium security penitentiary at Tracy, California) on the tortuous road through the "big leagues" of the California prison system.

When Jimmy was 17 he was sent to San Quentin for his involvement in a race riot at Tracy. In 1959 there were over five thousand convicts there: Jimmy was the youngest. The authorities were breaking their own law by holding him there.

Prison officials, particularly in the explosive maximum security institutions, had always done everything possible to pit the cons against each other so as to keep them from banding together against their captors. By throwing together known enemies, circulating false rumors and the like, the guards were usually able to keep the cons from having any idea what was going on or where the ever-present threat of death would materialize. In the late '50s, the convicts began to react to this by seeking identification with their own race. Blacks, chicanos, indians and whites formed cliques which fought each other ferociously.

Jimmy spent a great deal of his first trip to San Quentin in the Adjustment Center, the unheated isolation wing reserved for incorrigibles. Here he met Muslim leaders Lamar Rivers and Booker North. He respected their courage and espousal of black pride, but rejected the Muslim philosophy for its relative pacifism: Jimmy wanted to fight.

After a lawsuit forced the removal of juveniles from Quentin, Jimmy was transferred to Soledad, a medium security institution with a mixed population of older convicts, juveniles like Jimmy and young cons being given a last chance before life at Folsom or San Quentin. He, George Jackson, his partner from Tracy, and a small group of black convicts got very tight, controlling the gambling with marked cards and weighted dice and getting "cigarette rich" (cigarettes are the prisoners' medium of exchange). There were a lot of fights, including one big massacre, over the usual issues--homosexuals, debts and ratpacking. Jimmy and George did a lot of growing up at Soledad: they learned how to fight successfully, how to take control of situations and hussles, and how to tell a friend from a fool. After the D-Wing takeover and 29 days in the hole at San Quentin, Jimmy was sent back to Tracy and then home to L.A.

In 1962, after a few fruitful months on the streets, Jimmy found himself back in San Quentin on an armed robbery charge, this time as an adult with a five-to-life sentence. A full-blown race war was going on. There was at least one death a month, and the fights were constant. Jimmy quickly revived the Wolf Pack (the main black group from Soledad), which soon evolved from a gang into a political organization. These desperate rebels felt that social change in America was hopeless, and began to look to Africa--to the national struggles in Guinea, Mozambique, and Angola--for their inspiration. Under the guidance of George Jackson, the Wolf Pack members studied Pan-Africanism, reading everything they could find about African history and philosophy and dreaming of escape and guerrilla war.

Nationalist ideology started the development of the convicts' ability to see their relationship to the outside world. This led to a breakdown in the authorities' control; the guards responded with more force and manipulation. They were experts at keeping the races at each others' throats, squashing any inkling of interracial rebellion (like joint hunger strikes or lock-ins) by setting up riots. They instigated assaults and welcomed revenge. Although all the cons knew who the real enemy was, they spent most of their time and energy dealing with their immediate enemies--each other.

The only break in the tension (other than the actual fighting) was a series of businesses that George and Jimmy ran. At various times they controlled the dope dealing (selling dope brought in by the guards), gambling, bootlegging, weapon dealing and debt-collecting concessions at San Quentin, and fought anyone who got in the way of their success.

In 1965 the authorities decided they'd better split these two up.

Jimmy was sent to C.M.C.-East, the summer camp of the prison system, where homosexuals paraded around in tight shorts, teased hair and make-up, and cons played golf. Jimmy quickly established himself as a badass, but gradually decided to play it cool for a while in order to avoid a transfer to Folsom. He concentrated on educating himself: being away from George had made him realize that he'd depended on George to do his thinking. He started with philosophy, which soon led him to Marx and his first real understanding of class struggle. Before he had thought that he and his comrades were freaks for rebelling against authority. Jimmy did a lot of cell time, studying Marx and mathematics, fantasizing about the red army of lumpens he hoped to lead on the streets. He knew if he blew his cover just once he'd die in the joint. He now felt that he had things to do on the streets.

He improved his image by joining the C.M.C. weight-lifting team. After a year of strict training he became very strong, winning the California prison heavyweight title every year he competed and breaking some national records along the way.

Jimmy was supporting himself in basically the same way he had done at Quentin, but behind his new, quiet front. He maintained the philosophy that as long as he was locked up he would let the police know he was there, but he stayed away from the things that obviously meant a write-up, like violence or proselytizing. He took the easiest official jobs that he could find, working in the gym and the garden (while he lived off a very rich young fool), and slowly worked his way out of the joint. In late 1969, after years of intense study, he was accepted to the University of California at Santa Cruz as a student and math teaching assistant, and was released in July, 1970.

Santa Cruz wasn't exactly Watts. It was a quiet, upper-middle class liberal college with a handful of middle class blacks and a few white militants. Jimmy kept himself busy for a while with women, dope, trips to Oakland, and some involvement with the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee. He continued to search for the Red Army, but found instead a group of red criminals with a veneer of ideology covering the old "philosophy of crime." He went along with this for the ride, the dope and the money; the ideology made it easy to swallow.

He was also working as a sociology T.A. In April of 1971 he took some of his students to a Soledad Brothers hearing in San Francisco. A fight broke out in the courtroom when a deputy seized a newspaper from George; Jimmy jumped in and was arrested.

In San Francisco County Jail Jimmy, since he'd been on parole, was faced with life imprisonment for his involvement in a five-minute scuffle. He realized that as a militant he would always be at the mercy of such arbitrary crises. He began to examine his activities and ideology and found it reactionary--direct responses to crimes committed by the state, using the terms, terrain and weapons dictated by the enemy.

In August George Jackson was killed in the San Quentin Adjustment Center. The death of his closest friend was the shock that brought together and clarified his thoughts about ideology. He tried for awhile to discuss his changes with his old friends, but most of those who didn't resent what he told them about their self-defeating strategy simply didn't understand. Many of them had looked to Jimmy to be the next "cause celebre" after George; instead he was telling them there could be no more such causes.

Three long weeks later Jimmy's daughter was born. This helped to relieve the grief. Jimmy read, wrote letters and had a little fun, waiting for some decision on his future from the courts and the Adult Authority. At the end of December his lawyer negotiated a misdemeanor plea with time served as the sentence, and Jimmy was released on parole and probation.

In San Jose with his family, Jimmy began for the first time to live a relatively normal life. He'd been struggling all his life to get beyond the choice of living on his knees or dying on his feet. Now he could live on his feet. He was thinking clearly, out of the pressure cooker, for the first time in his life. He was learning to create revolutionary theory rather than accept ideology. He was working on his autobiography, BAD, reading more, playing with his kid, gardening and visiting friends. In early April, 1972, he got a job as a construction worker. Three days later he was murdered. Jimmy's death, which saddened and enraged nearly everyone he knew, was never explained. Two men were convicted of murdering him, but their motives and connections with Jimmy weren't revealed by the state, and perhaps never will be. This fact is not nearly so galling, however, as the knowledge that for Jimmy Carr, death came after the end of one life and at the beginning of another.