

## Jackson, Sinwar, and Fanon: Intersections of Anti-Colonial Death



“The tragedy of the white man lies in the fact that he once killed another person, and to this day, they continue to rationalize this inhumane act.” This quote encapsulates a long and harrowing history of white violence—not only against colonized peoples, but even against their own so-called “countrymen” whom they deem as other, as less human, solely because of the color of their skin.

Such was the case of George Jackson, the African American political prisoner and revolutionary, who was killed by the U.S. prison system. Before his death, however, Jackson left behind a legacy of thought and radical praxis that, along with the circumstances of his killing, shaped one of the most profound anti-imperialist struggles in modern history.

But how did Jackson’s political thought and revolutionary journey take shape? And how did his internationalist ideology—developed from within prison walls—intersect with the Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation?

**Blackness: From Criminal Consciousness to Revolutionary Consciousness**

George Jackson, born September 23, 1941, was imprisoned at the age of eighteen for stealing \$70 from a gas station. In 1961, he was sentenced to one

year to life in prison—a legal paradox that led to him spending eleven years behind bars, eight of them in solitary confinement.

Like tens of thousands of other Black Americans, Jackson belonged to what Marx called the lumpenproletariat—a destitute class of workers who didn't even have steady capitalist employment. Instead, Jackson spent his days with other outcasts, drifting between street corners and cafés, living a life devoid of basic human dignity.

In prison, Jackson encountered a microcosm of systemic neglect and brutality. The incarcerated were not just isolated; they were dehumanized—deprived of food, sleep, and medical care. The prison system exploited their bodies as a source of cheap labor: cooking, baking, cleaning, and manufacturing.

As Jackson came to understand it, prisons—both in America and the Arab world—functioned as industrial machines, turning human beings into captive laborers serving the interests of the state and capital.

“I met Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Engels, and Mao when I entered prison—and they redeemed me from prison,” Jackson wrote in *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*. In that book, he described his transformation through political education, and how the writings of these revolutionary thinkers illuminated a new path for collective liberation—especially for Black and marginalized communities in the United States.

To Jackson, the prison was not a place for reform, but a mechanism to erase the humanity of its captives and turn them into disposable tools. Through reading and study, Jackson sharpened his understanding of imperialism and systemic oppression.

He also engaged with the works of Frantz Fanon, whose decolonial philosophy helped Jackson frame questions like: How does one live under domination? How does one resist? How can the colonized reclaim their humanity?

“In the early history of industrialization, workers demanded the right to work. To this day, masses of Black Americans are still denied this basic right. They live as precarious laborers—last hired, first fired. We must not ignore the revolutionary potential of organizing the unemployed and the lumpenproletariat.”

In this passage, Jackson showed his commitment not just to political elites or intellectuals but to the disenfranchised, including gang members. He worked with inmates like Louis and James Carr, W.L. Nolen, Bill Christmas, and Ture Gibson—helping transform their rebellious energies into revolutionary consciousness. The goal was no longer crime, but collective liberation.

Jackson later joined the Black Panther Party, which had emerged after the

assassination of Malcolm X in 1965. Through the Party, Jackson published articles in its international magazine, reaching tens of thousands of readers around the world.

After his death, two major works were published: *Blood in My Eye* and *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*. These writings form the theoretical core of his vision for liberation from both imperialism and the prison-industrial complex.

### Resisting Death with Death

Jackson was not content with theory alone. He scrutinized every aspect of prison life and understood that prisons are not reformatory but carceral tools that serve the state's desire to contain and control the marginalized. From this understanding, Jackson spearheaded movements of unrest and resistance inside prison walls—organizing protests and strikes that eventually spread to dozens of U.S. prisons.

These uprisings weren't isolated. The late 1960s and early 1970s were a time of massive social upheaval. Black, working-class, and student movements across the U.S. rose in opposition to the Vietnam War. Simultaneously, student and labor protests erupted across Europe, particularly in France, echoing similar demands for justice and dignity.

The resistance inside prisons mirrored and amplified the protests outside. Jackson and others understood the prison as a concentrated form of the state—a miniature replica of capitalist and imperialist society. Conversely, rebellion within prisons could ignite external uprisings, especially when prisoners had political affiliations and media connections—as was the case with the Black Panther Party.

On August 21, 1971, George Jackson was killed by prison authorities at San Quentin. Accounts of his death vary. One version suggests that Jackson and his comrades—Fleeta Drumgo and John Clutchette—were framed for the murder of a prison guard and then executed by firing squad. Another, more widely accepted account, says he was shot during an attempted escape that involved taking prison guards hostage.

Due to the secrecy of prison systems, the exact details remain unclear. What is certain is that Jackson was silenced violently, his body marked by the repressive state he spent his life resisting.

### The Colonial Death Machine and Palestine

Today, the Palestinian struggle stands at the center of global consciousness, especially since the October 7 Hamas-led operation and Israel's ongoing war of extermination in Gaza. Palestine was present in George Jackson's political

imagination as well. Through reading Sartre, Marx, Fanon, and Trotsky, he came to see Palestine as a critical node in the global anti-colonial network.

Among the revolutionary literature that accompanied him in prison was the poem *Enemy of the Sun* by Palestinian poet Samih al-Qasim. One verse reads:

“You may raise around me a wall, and a wall, and a wall.

You may crucify my days upon humiliating visions,

O enemy of the sun—

But I shall not compromise,

And to my last heartbeat, I shall resist.”

Jackson was deeply moved by the poem. “Who is the enemy of the sun,” he asked, “if not the occupier or the jailer?” The poem was later published in the Black Panther Party’s magazine alongside his photograph.

“When I discovered this, I realized how the words of a poet from Galilee could be read by Black people in America and make us say: Yes! This poem was written for us!” said Black American scholar Greg Thomas in an interview with Lebanese researcher Sabah Jalloul for *The Arab Reader*.

Jackson understood the link between the oppression of Black people in America and the broader colonial exploitation of the Global South—especially in Palestine, where the U.S. plays a central role in upholding the Israeli settler regime. For Jackson, there was no dividing line between anti-Black racism and the expropriation of Palestinian land. His revolutionary praxis was global, connecting north and south, prison and homeland, in one unified struggle.

He knew that death awaited him in prison. He often said he was “slowly waiting to die.” But he chose to rebel, to make his death part of the fight. His decision was not a personal act of desperation—it was a collective revolutionary gesture, much like that of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar in Gaza.

Sinwar, often called “the George Jackson of Palestine,” spent 22 years behind Israeli bars—twice the duration of Jackson’s imprisonment. Though the contexts of Gaza and U.S. prisons are vastly different, symbolically and philosophically, their struggles intersect. Both men were shaped by incarceration and chose to resist—even at the cost of their lives.

Jackson was killed—according to the most credible account—while fighting prison guards for his freedom and dignity. Sinwar is believed to have been killed fighting the occupying force, defending his land and people.

As we began with Fanon, we return to him. “Capitalism created Marx, Sicilian poverty created Garibaldi, Russian autocracy created Lenin, and British colonialism created Gandhi. As for Fanon, he was created by the white man.” The

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Martinican philosopher—whose dark skin was once pointed at by French children—knew that systems of domination forge our resistance.

Jackson, Sinwar, Fanon—they were not anomalies. They were products of their oppressive environments, shaped by imperialism, colonialism, and systemic dehumanization. In return, they crafted revolutionary philosophies, practices, and legacies of resistance.

This transformation has its costs: years of brutal imprisonment, destroyed families, razed cities, and lost lives. For those resisting darkness and bondage—individually or collectively—the only path forward is through critical awareness, historical study, and strategic action, so that future generations can chart freer, more conscious paths in a world still shackled by colonial power.

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