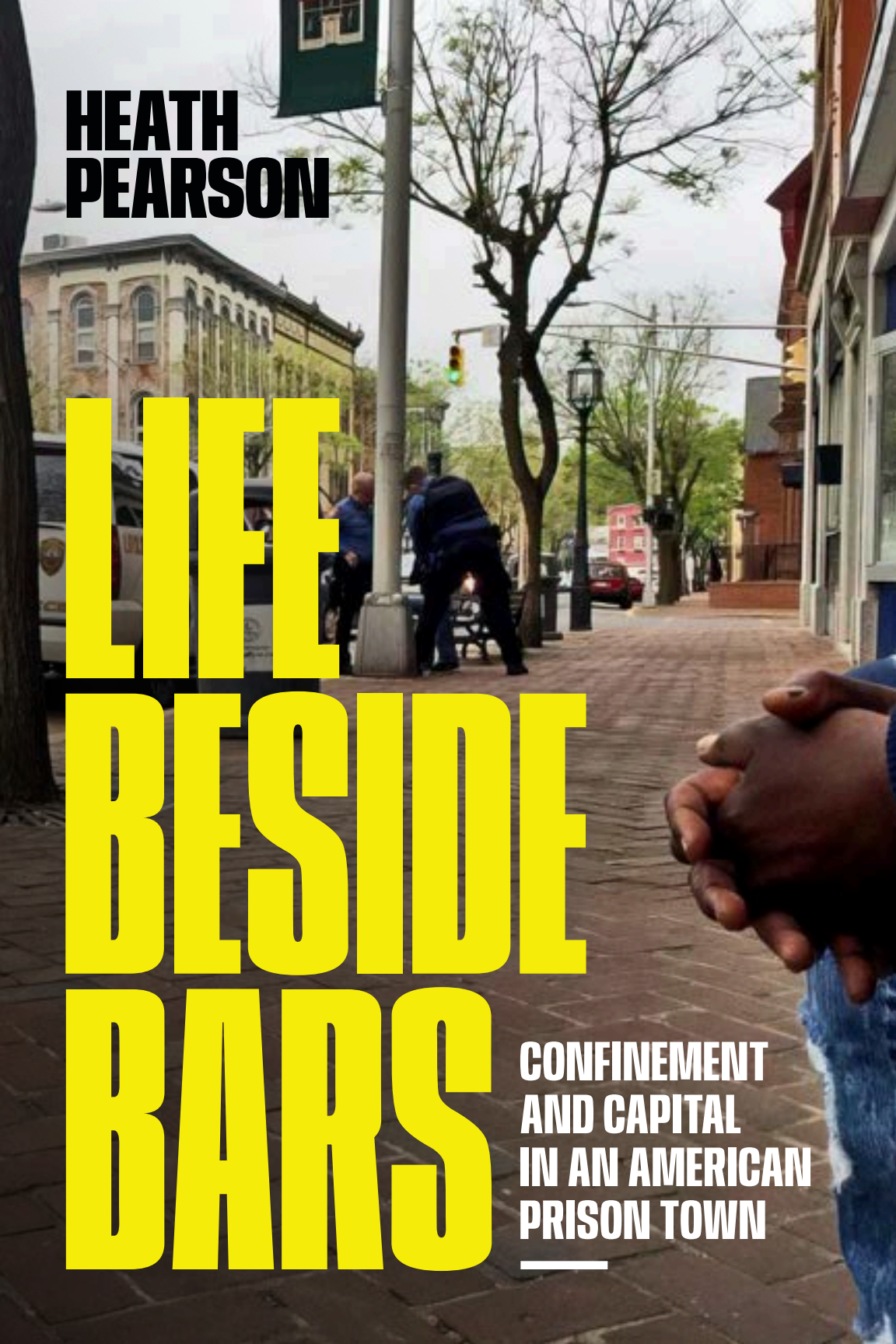

HEATH PEARSON

LIFE BESIDE BARS

CONFINEMENT AND CAPITAL IN AN AMERICAN PRISON TOWN

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FOR MY MOM,
WHO HAS ALWAYS BEEN.

CONTENTS

PREFACE

In 1986, reactor four at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant melted and caught fire, burning like hell for nine straight days. Radioactive material released into the ground, water, and air was substantial. Pine trees surrounding the site rusted red. More than one hundred thousand people fled. A twenty-mile radius etched around the meltdown established a zone of restriction to human access and development. As I finished this manuscript, the details of this nuclear meltdown seeped into my mind.

This is because the zone did not remain a post-apocalyptic hellscape as people imagined it would. It became forest overgrowing abandoned buildings; bears frolicking in unlit streets; packs of wild horses, boars, and gray wolves roaming; flora and fauna swarming home gardens and sidewalks and fields. Humans returned—scientists, workers, even so-called squatters reclaiming life beside a smoldering nuclear core. And while toxicity levels remain high in the soil, in the animals, in the plants and insects, life floods the zone, unexpectedly filling what human endeavors all but snuffed silent.

Prison facilities are a bit like nuclear power plants. Except, even when operating as planned, they produce sprawling zones of restriction in places the wider society prefers to avoid. The southeastern border of New Jersey that is centered in this book has five facilities, trapping more than 6,400 people each and every day. Like nuclear spillage, confinement radiates through the region's ground, water, and air. It attaches to animals, plants, and humans, saturating the landscape in rusty hues. Toxicity levels are high. And they could very well stay high into the next century. But the relentless pulse of social life nevertheless beats on. This is the inevitability I hope to convey in the pages that follow. Prisons will get their due. The fallout zone of confinement is going nowhere soon. But to believe in the totality of its greedy grip, to see only the reach of prisons, is something akin to the effects of radiation poisoning. When we get close enough, way, way down beside it, we can feel the force of common life, surrounding confinement's false image, everywhere on the move.

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Unending thanks to Bridget Purcell, whose love, encouragement, support, and razor-sharp critiques since the first day of research kept me and this project going. To my little boo, Wilder Marxley, who takes me into new worlds each and every day with wonder, joy, and love. Deep and everlasting gratitude to Sharalyn Hyman, my mom, and Mark Hyman, my pops, who love me without account and who always direct my feet when I cannot find the path. Thank you to Brittney Pearson and Drew Pearson, who prop me up and carry me along with love, fellowship, and humor. Thank you to "Bluegill" Bill Pearson, my grandpa, who modeled regimented consistency even when I wasn't paying attention. And in memory of my grandparents, Ray and Wilma Markley, and Gloria Pearson, who loved me unconditionally.

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INTRODUCTION

SOCIAL LIFE TO THE SIDE

> The Premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination.
>
> **KARL MARX** | *The German Ideology* (1978)

> Every day, I live prison on the outside.
>
> **HERC NELSON**

Shakes was sick, so I was on my own for lunch. I jammed the phone into my pocket and drove a few short blocks from the Spot to the Mill, across the street from the county courthouse. The dining room was stuffed with chattering professionals, but the oblong bar had a few empty stools, so I plopped down.

"Are you in a hurry?" the bartender asked, wiping the bar's surface with a grimy-gray rag.

"Nope," I replied.

"Good."

She made her way around the oval bar, snatching up empties, pouring coffee, delivering fresh bottles of beer and plates of food and joking with the white-haired lunch crowd. Ten minutes later, she was back in front of me.

"You're new in town, huh?"

"Yes," I replied. "I have been here for about nine months and will be here for another year or two."

"Why would you move *here*?" Setting the coffeepot on the bar, a hand on her hip.

I laughed. "Because I am doing research."

"Ohhhh, I know who *you* are! I've heard of you. You're here to study the prisons or something, aren't you?"

"Umm, yeah, I am here to study how the prisons have impacted the area. How did you know that?" I laughed. "Who told you?"

"I-I-I can't remember," she stumbled sheepishly, perhaps not expecting the question. "Do you want to hear what I think about how all the prisons have impacted this town?"

"I would love to hear your perspective." I slid a small, gray notebook from my pocket. "That's why I'm here."

"*Nada!*" Raising a hand in my face in the shape of a zero. "I'm sure that's not what you wanted to hear, but they haven't had any impact on this town whatsoever. And I would know—my daughter and two of my sons-in-law *work* as corrections officers!"

The bartender speaks from the side, where regular old workdays, personal opinions, and multigenerational family interests gather in the accumulation of lived experiences that happen in a place called home. Like most residents I met, the bartender never once heard the phrase "mass incarceration" or spent any time scrolling through editorials about the failures of the criminal justice system. Her thoughts on the county's five facilities were rooted in family relationships, in what they provided for her children and grandchildren, in how they sustained the region, even as the factories and farms fled. For the bartender, prisons were part of the place, like anything else.

Life beside Bars showcases social life in a region with five correctional facilities. The stories take place in Cumberland County, located way down along the southeastern border of New Jersey, where three state prisons—two of which share a working dairy farm—one federal prison, and a regional jail have been squeezed into a twenty-mile radius.[1] On any given day, 6,400 people are confined across the five facilities, plus many thousands more on probation or parole. Another 147,000 people live in the area surrounding the facilities.[2] The county has the second-highest

concentration of correctional jobs in the country.[3] And this does not include the thousands of people who are employed in the court system, legal offices, social services, prison-adjacent nonprofits, and police and sheriff departments, and the friends and family of those who are confined. As Carl, a local pastry baker in part 1, said to me: "There is a lot of corrections going on."

This book is about slowing down to spend time with many different kinds of people who have carved out meaningful and sometimes radical social life adjacent to large-scale human confinement. It is easy to think of correctional facilities as institutions that are set apart, tucked away, impermeable, and functioning far outside the activities and concerns of daily life. And for many people across the United States, this may be true—prisons exist somewhere else. But for the millions upon millions upon millions of people who live in close proximity to prisons, who rely on them for employment, who regularly visit, write to, think about, and care for people trapped in them, prisons are a regular feature of social life. My aim in this book is to emphasize close contact with folks who have spent the better part of their lives navigating the spaces that surround Cumberland County's five facilities. And my hope is that in meeting all kinds of people who occupy the same to-the-side spaces as the bartender, readers will learn something about prisons and their function within one locale, catching a glimmer of the alternative rhythms, a spark of the resilience and resistance, an appreciation for the beauty of social life happening in a place that was developed through the mechanism of confinement.

I began fieldwork on the wave of national protesting that marked the early and mid-2010s, supercharged to challenge the owner class and to continue organizing with others toward the abolition of the system of prisons and policing. I also became entangled with prisons and policing on a personal level and learned quickly how confusing, overwhelming, exhausting, and impossible it was to try to support a loved one who was confined or in process. Fighting in the courts, like fighting in the streets, exhausts one to the bones. And my family was ill prepared to face off with the so-called criminal justice system. We were working class with no money, zero extra time, and scant political connections, stretched between multiple low-wage jobs. It was enough simply trying to keep up with the normal demands and expenses of everyday life. Never mind

piling on the weight and cost of a loved one's (potential) imprisonment. So, I wanted to use ethnographic research to connect with others who also had firsthand experiences—people who, from my perspective, had been largely ignored in the wider conversation happening despite their lifelong efforts in developing skills and forging relationships in a landscape dominated by militarized policing and multiple prisons.

I thus set out to write a prison "history from below."[4] Or, more correctly, to write a prison history from the spaces beside a whole bunch of prisons. I was committed to following the tradition of radical historians, theorists, and anthropologists who took seriously the ideas, the actions, the relationships, and the politics of people who were finding ways to build robust social life within the nooks and crannies of capitalist systems of domination—people who were daily targets of police, who had spent time confined in a prison, or who, perhaps, had friends and family in prison. But, at the very same time, I also wanted to speak with people who benefited—directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally—from the sprawling social, political, and economic possibilities produced by prisons. Because, as with the bartender, if a person was a resident of Cumberland County, then they most certainly had some kind of tangled relationship to the prisons and the policing that helped fill them.

The range of relationships to the prisons encountered in the vignettes that follow, then, are something like the diversity of experiences highlighted by Tania Murray Li among the highlanders of Sulawesi, who, in the 1990s, were introduced to the savage process of capitalism ordering the privatization of their ancestral lands.[5] Many highlanders quickly lost family parcels and thus their present and future livelihoods. Like a plague of locusts, the gobble of privatization chewed across the land, hungry and teeming, laying boundaries over what had been eternally shared and fraying social relationships beyond repair. And, exactly as most people experienced devastating loss and debilitating debt, a few highlanders, some lucky and some shrewd, turned around to find themselves at the top of the hierarchy—more land, better crops, bigger savings accounts, and even able to profit from extending credit to people they once lived and worked with in common.

The same is true of the prisons and the militarized police departments that patrol the streets. The early days of drug war policing hit many by surprise, squarely in the mouth. Officers raided homes, blew up corners, seized vehicles, patrolled school hallways, and targeted young

people—especially black, brown, and poor people—with a supreme viciousness that left so many dead, broken, incarcerated, and sometimes, with the aid of lengthy sentences handed down by the courts, permanently confined and separated from friends and family. As the war clawed along, the prison population grew and grew. But those who were lucky enough to stay out found all kinds of ways to prosper and even build social and political power. Corrections officers in this part of New Jersey, for example, make considerably more in annual salaries than teachers, and they exercise vice-clamped control over certain public spheres, like one of the school boards, where they have held nearly all the elected seats (including president) for almost two decades. Other corrections officers have amassed statewide political power, bending the ears of governors and congresspeople and media personalities alike. Police officers, who also make far more in annual salaries than teachers, have gained local power, as well as fast cars, access to weapons of death, and, perhaps most importantly, a kind of personal and familial immunity from the attention and surveilling of drug policing itself. Still others, like retired high school teacher Mickey Kite, saw opportunities in snatching up the increasingly available foreclosed or devalued housing while paroled people with few alternatives were suddenly in need of qualified housing.[6] Even the prison-adjacent nonprofits have created wealth and social power for a handful of (mostly white) people. Prisons, like private property, have created cascading economic and political opportunities for a few as they dominate life for the many.

For those who are trapped on the underside of the prisons' domination, though, it is never the only dimension to their existence. Far from it. Robin D. G. Kelley makes this point in *Race Rebels*. Beginning in the late-1970s kitchen of a Pasadena McDonald's, employees who were ridden by the constant surveillance of swing managers and treated as stupid and lower class by the customers developed "inventive ways to compensate" for their exploitative working conditions, like liberating boxes of cookies, making too many burgers and fries near closing time, or offering to clean the parking lot so they could linger outside with friends.[7] Kelley defines these acts as both rebellious and political, and he centers them as endeavors to retain personal dignity while transforming the routinized work of fast food into pleasurable play.[8] Kelley builds on the insights of James Scott and Lila Abu-Lughod, bringing them into a California fast-food kitchen, to argue that these everyday acts of rebellion are, on the

one hand, illuminative of how structures of domination reproduce across time and place and, on the other, are instructive in expanding our imagination of what another world might look, feel, and sound like.[9]

This, too, is similar to what I found scattered across Cumberland County. Tucked into the everyday grind of the region's relentlessly hostile landscape were sparks of resistance and bursts of joy, spaces that were momentarily broken open for sharing, supporting, laughing, and communing and collective acts that at times conjured momentary alternative worlds swaying to rhythms all their own. Like old-school thirty-five-millimeter slides, these tiny moments were difficult to glimpse on their own, from a detached distance with untrained perception, but up close, when sitting in the company of others who knew how to see, hear, touch, and feel them, light passed through to cast into relief a radically different social world not in some grainy, yellow-tinted future but in the very present, nestled right beside systems or moments of domination: a public defense attorney who reconciled with the recently paroled person who murdered her brother, a group of formerly incarcerated men sharing a small business storefront, a young girl riding her bicycle in squealing joy as the family picks up the fractured pieces of life after a devastating police raid. The carceral system of domination in the region remains powerful and merciless but is also incapable of silencing social life, of crushing people into acquiescence, of confining them out of existence.

Instead, folks who were targeted and subjugated in the region, especially those who belonged to families that had lived locally for multiple generations, inherited an understanding of how (their local) domination worked, as well as a cluster of practices for resisting it that had accumulated through decades if not centuries of collective life. Cedric Robinson refers to this accumulation of knowledge, imagination, and practice across privatized space and capitalist time as "the socialist impulse," which names the persistence of the human spirit to carry on and reinvigorate "visions of an alternative order" irrespective to the political or economic systems working to dominate life and land.[10] For many people I met, their families had been targeted, policed, corralled, confined, and exploited as controllable, exploitable labor across hundreds of years. They had learned tactics of resistance and calculated cunning of the ways the present system of confinement functions, of how police officers actually behave in the streets, of who could be trusted and who could not, from their parents and grandparents, friends and siblings, and of course through their own experiences. Keeping someone free of confinement

was a gargantuan collective effort, a local fact as relevant to the present as it had been to the past. This is why I frame the study through the ongoing reproduction of confinement rather than the specific entrance of the prison facilities.

Barbaric systems for human confinement have been central to the region's political economy for nearly four hundred years. The genocide of the Lenni Lenape people and the theft and enslavement of African descended people for agricultural work established a rigid order over land as it entrenched a hierarchy of labor. Brutal conditions for farm workers remained long after the collapse of slavery. In the ramp-up to the United States' entrance into World War II, the largest farm in the region (and in New Jersey) built on-site labor camps to house thousands of recently "interned" Japanese Americans brought by train from the West Coast. They expanded the labor camps by transplanting prisoners of war and other displaced people from Europe. Then they filled the camps after World War II by recruiting people from Jamaica and elsewhere. The farm folded in the late 1950s, and within a decade there was a gleaming new state prison that was shortly thereafter surrounded by an operational dairy farm where imprisoned people were put to work. The three additional prison facilities were added over the next three decades (1970s–2000s). Cumberland County is not a region that lost industry and then randomly fixed it with prisons. It is a region that has used systems for human confinement to establish and reproduce its political economy across four hundred years. Confinement and (then) capital. Today's prisons are only the current system.

And even still, in each era of confinement, people were wily and unpredictable, resisting and refusing the overseers of confinement every step of the way. Enslaved people in these parts constantly broke tools, sloughed work responsibilities, held illicit meetings, and escaped regularly. Folks did the same during the era of Seabrook Farm's labor camps. And almost before the paint dried on the new state prison (Leesburg), people escaped. Most famously, George Wright, who liberated the warden's car, hopped on and then redirected a commercial flight, and eventually made his way to Portugal, where today he lives with his family in a little white house near the shore. No matter the system or style of confinement, targeted and trapped people have always found ways to avoid or undermine capitalist working conditions, escape

confinement when the moment presents itself, and build robust social life along the way.[11]

It is the consistency of unpredictability, of the impulse for social life, of the refusal to be defined or determined by systems of domination that led me to the vignette form this ethnography takes up.[12] The primary aim of each vignette is to make space for people to speak and act on their own terms from the flow of their own contexts. The moments that make up the book are intended to encapsulate particular relationships to, experiences in, or perspectives of the prisons and policing while also illuminating the unexpected breaks where the pulse of social life manifests.[13] The vignettes do not revolve around one heroic person and their relentless will. And they are not driving toward a singular finale like a detective novel. There are no conclusions or solutions to be found anywhere in this book. Instead, the vignettes revolve around collectives, groups of people, families, and friends, and they highlight the significance of strong, supportive relationships as the grounding of social life to the side of capitalist domination.

The vignettes are organized into three parts—part 1, "Domination"; part 2, "Resistance"; part 3, "To-the-Side." There are no composite characters or fabricated scenes. And a list of each person's age, race, class, and occupation can be found in appendix 2. The conversations that unfold in each vignette are based on the time I spent with people across three years of in-person research. All but a handful were recorded on my phone. I have cut them into vignettes to crystallize differing experiences, histories, opinions, dreams, and clusters of relationships or political orientations as they relate to the organizing category. For example, in part 1, I introduce people who are targeted by policing and prisons, people who do the targeting, who desire to do the targeting, or who benefit from others being targeted, and also people who sit back safely, protected from the domination of being targeted, and muse on all of it. Each and every resident, though, necessarily contends with the context of capitalist domination that has been created by four hundred years of human confinement. The simple point is that each experiences it in radically different ways. This is the core of tending to everyday life to the side of domination. Most of the time, there is no tidy resolution or simple solution;[14] there is only life in the flow, on its way, messy, mired, and to the side, complex and contradictory, ambitious and accidental, refusing and resisting, reaching

for connection with others. What makes the people and events in these vignettes unique is the extreme context of multiple prisons and militarized policing around which all of this stuff happens.

Part 1 centers prisons as the current system of confinement used to maintain social control through the hierarchization and exploitation of humans for labor. It elucidates the idea that confinement is the engine driving the region's social, political, and economic systems while teasing apart how prisons have in fact advanced capital production by eliminating the need for commodities, and thus also the requirement to set labor to work making commodities.[15] "Domination" names how systems of capitalist reproduction function in and across time and place. My specific use gestures to Stuart Hall's "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance" but most specifically builds on Clyde Woods's critical-historical approach in *Development Arrested*, where he traces the *longue durée* of plantation power relations in the Mississippi Delta. Woods meticulously reveals how the owner class (those he calls "planters") plotted and manipulated to perpetually reshape the political economy in order to maintain "plantation-centered development" and hegemonic control over the land and labor.[16] He shows how the legal edifice for slavery was disassembled and put back together in bits and pieces, preserving the social, political, and economic logics and practices of the plantation system. The same is true of confinement in Cumberland County. It has been disassembled and remade across hundreds of years, always in ways that preserve the labor hierarchy and modes of social control similar to those established during the era of plantation slavery. This is not to suggest today's prisons are "the same" mode of domination as slavery, Lenape reservations, or World War II labor camps, but the prisons (with the militarized police forces) target black, brown, and poor people for elimination or containment; order the landscape; structure the labor hierarchy; and function within and for the political economy in ways similar to past systems.

Part 2 features a diverse landscape of people who are explicitly working against, organizing, and fighting the domination of prisons and policing. It revolves around the distinct ways that people become entangled in collective efforts of resistance, how the system itself manages to incorporate its own opposition in order to stifle dissent, and it highlights the many ways organizers struggle with others to fight back. It fractures and challenges the idea of a uniform philosophy, politics, or practice of resistance. Everything is messy, compromised, and in the flow of life. As Avery Gordon reminds us, "It is a fact of great analytic importance

that life is complicated," and we must hold tightly to this if we are to "see deep into the heart and soul of American life and culture, to track events, stories . . . and history-making actions . . . to the point where we might catch a glimpse of . . . society and imagine otherwise."[17] Following people whose efforts are sliced through and bound up by competing and oppositional commitments, as most all of our efforts are, provides a glimpse of the culture of this region of southern New Jersey, perhaps even of wider US society. There is no monolithic approach or political orientation that unites people who resist the prisons' domination across the region. It instead appears in many different forms, spearheaded by people with different and sometimes opposed aims, orientations, and visions for the future. The common thread of resistance is neither politics nor practice but how the mode of domination perpetually works to define its own resistance. And how it works to bring into itself those who stand against it. Part 2 offers a glimpse of the deep-seated punitive or carceral logic, and it reveals complexity at the core of people who must, on the one hand, find ways to build sustainable life in a region that specializes in correctional jobs but who, on the other hand, feel compelled to work collectively to fight the prisons and police in the hopes that they can bring about long-lasting change. "Resistance" limns what society is, what it might be, and how people are working to make it happen, and it illuminates the many difficulties in disentangling one's beliefs and activities from the dialectic of domination—resistance.

Part 3 moves through conversations with people whose efforts and activities unfold in places that are blurred to the side, outside the gaze of politicians or police, and away from noisy fights in the streets.[18] If the region's political economy is an outcome of different systems of confinement across hundreds of years, then "To-the-Side" names the unruly (spaces) that do not conform to the values, temporalities, or logics of the system—not because they are accepting it or resisting it but because they are moving in other ways, at other speeds, quietly beside it. I first took note of life to the side when reading an archived letter from World War II. A local mayor—writing to C. F. Seabrook about the arrival of interned Japanese Americans—states that "securing . . . American-Japanese citizens for labor [is preferable to] the undesirable southern Negro labor, [who are] unruly and are continually causing the local police considerable difficulty by fighting and continually behaving in a disorderly manner" (see appendix 1 for the full letter). This reminded me of Fred Moten highlighting Immanuel Kant's inadvertent acknowledgment of "the prior resistance

(unruly sociality, anarchic syntax, extrasensical poetics) to that politics that calls it into being."[19] That is to say, Moten turns attention to what he calls the "unruly sociality" that exceeds (in all directions) political and economic domination. It manifests and disperses before the before, after the after, in the break, or, in my language, off to the side of domination and resistance. I first learned to recognize it at the Spot—a small men's clothing store in one of the old downtowns that is owned and managed by two lifelong residents who were entangled with prisons and targeted by drug war policing in their twenties and thirties.

One afternoon, a large group was standing outside the Spot, debating the intersections of federal politics, state prisons, and the social health of the town in light of what needed to change. This vignette appears in part 3. The primary need was the creation of places where "interdependent" community with others could be possible. Interdependent community comprises horizontal relationships that foster mutual care and resource sharing[20]—what might be thought of as something like small-scale, mostly disorganized socialism[21] that is also committed to sharing in the process of personal healing. The people who spent time at the Spot were deeply committed to building and maintaining this space, however momentary or fleeting, where joy, possibility, healing, care of all forms, and even freedom might be possible. Soon, I looked to the side everywhere.

I conclude with vignettes organized to the side because outright resistance is only one mode of living amid and collectively undermining capitalist systems of domination. Or, as Saba Mahmood writes in the 2012 preface to *The Politics of Piety*, "acts of resistance to relations of domination constitute one modality of action, [but] they certainly do not exhaust the field of human action."[22] That is to say, meaningful social life is constituted by far more than negotiating, plotting, and fighting racial capitalism. These spaces and brief moments challenge the totality of domination by tending to the parts of life often neglected and suppressed amid the dizzying work of fighting back (or theorizing about fighting back). Cedric Robinson contends on the first page of *An Anthropology of Marxism* that "the ultimate Marxian objective [is not the outcome of resistance but] the recovery of human life from the spoilage of degradation."[23] The vignettes in part 3 illuminate how people recover, tend to, and care for their own humanity and that of their family and friends. This is an important point to hold onto, because following people whose efforts are in excess of the dialectic suggests that social life, and practices that facilitate something like small-scale socialism, are not only the outcome

of overthrowing capitalism but are, also, prior to, in the middle of, to the side, and far beyond it. "To-the-Side" casts light on these spaces, moments, conversations, bursts of laughter, acts, and relationships in unapologetic hope that they are not only appreciated for their own sake but that they are inspirational for all who carry on and, at times, fight like hell beneath the blistering weight of capital.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1 Cumberland County Jail, Cumberland County Juvenile Detention Center, South Woods State, Bayside State (formerly Leesburg State), Southern State, and Fairton Federal.

2 Of 154,000 total people, 45 percent are white, 18 percent are African American, 0.9 percent are Native American, 1.2 percent are Asian, and 34 percent are Hispanic or Latino. Figures are taken from the 2020 US Census. See https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/cumberlandcountynewjersey,NJ/PST045222.

3 "Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics," US Bureau of Labor Statistics, May, 2022, https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes333012.htm.

4 Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 5–9.

5 Li, *Land's End*, 84–149.

6 At this time, there was also an increase of people moving into town from Central and South America.

7 Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 1.

8 Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 3–4.

9 Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 7–10.

10 Robinson, *Anthropology of Marxism*, 122–24.

11 For a more detailed history that includes archived letters, newspaper clippings, and land deeds, see appendix 1.

12 The vignette form of this book is deeply influenced by Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*.

13 Moten, *In the Break*, 85–169.

14 In *The Paradox of Relevance*, Carol Greenhouse defines the discourse of solutions that drives ethnographic imagination as the "aligning [of] social description with the discourse of federal political debate" (142). Greenhouse picks apart and analyzes ethnographies written in and about the United States to highlight the consistent practice of using specific life stories and personal narratives as ambiguous resources for generalized public use with aims toward the production of policy recommendations that might "make things better." Greenhouse argues that "the discourse of solutions prevails when providing solutions

for social problems is the precondition for anyone's interest in the experiences of men and women who live at the margins of recognition as neighbors, citizens, and human beings" (157). The drive toward solutions shapes and warps ethnographic research that enters the field, with a priori rubrics not only of who people are, based on national and federal categories, but also of what the alleged problems "those people" struggle with based on national and federal discourse within their particular locale. This approach to ethnographic fieldwork and the production of more generalizable knowledge is always already in danger of reifying racialized and classed differences by functionalizing people as their categories in order to use their experiences and ideas as representative examples for the purposes of intellectual analysis, social surveillance, political capture, and legislative recommendations.

15 Pearson, "Work without Labor," 167–92.

16 Woods, *Development Arrested*, 76–81.

17 Gordon, "Theory and Justice," 99–101.

18 In "Knowledge of Freedom," in *Stolen Life*, Fred Moten explores the "recidivist fringe [that] just won't act right no matter how much the power of judgment tries to make it 'well behaved'" (1). Moten writes to break out of the dialectic that holds freedom as a static abstraction that is conditional on the productive capacities of capital, be that through the emancipated self-realized self or the crumbling death of political economy as the condition of existence: "Its diplopic print is not marked 'before and after' but shows up as smudge, bend, ecstatic shift, common and impure" (1). There is a space in which freedom is known before the before of its unknowingness and impossibility, off to the side, away from the prior to or following of a "side step in apposition" (79), where what has been noncarceral before carceral was the given state of order. The smudge, the rhythms that beat and pulse to the side of rhythmic times, what Fanon refers to as a "blurred mass" (8) in *The Wretched of the Earth*, where that which is and breathes and lives and stretches is not responding to nor strictly speaking before but is speaking as that which is and is not. The Spot figures as something like this kind of space, where people, most specifically black middle-aged men who are both lifelong residents and formerly incarcerated, choreograph life together that is in excess of and outside the dialectic of domination or resistance, pessimism or possibility. It is a place entirely unrecognized by any person who has not already figured out how to find it and enter it. It is a place beyond the value of value, neither devalued nor valued, unimportant enough to surveil and insignificant enough to support. After a dicey three-month stretch, in which Shakes was wondering if he would have to close the doors, I

approached a nonprofit CEO whose building is across the street from the Spot and whose mission is to serve the community by meeting needs and connecting resources in real time, with special attention to formerly incarcerated people and their families. The first floor of the nonprofit's enormous nineteenth-century building was entirely empty, with massive street-facing windows. I thought it would make sense to invite Shakes to run his clothing store from there, since it aligned perfectly with his immediate needs and the nonprofit's stated goals. But the CEO looked at me as if I had been speaking in tongues. The support offered by meeting needs meant finding ways to incorporate people's needs beneath the nonprofit's leadership structure (similar to how prisons incorporate their own resistance). It meant getting in the way to provide support—not providing possibility and getting out of the way. The people at the Spot did not see themselves as emancipated products of the prison system nor as people needing support from nonprofit saviors. They saw life as exceeding what prisons tried to capture, control, and confine as capable, not simply of surviving the devastations of carceral capitalism but of sounding out beats that put the smooth rhythm of confinement out of sync so that they might be about and move about some other beat altogether.

19 Moten, "Knowledge of Freedom," in *Stolen Life*, 1–2.

20 Orisanmi Burton highlights a similar mode of life that happens inside prisons, when "captive men . . . develop deep and meaningful social ties based on mutual support rather than hierarchy." Burton, "Captivity, Kinship, and Black Masculine Care Work under Domestic Warfare," 622.

21 Here I am inspired by Cedric Robinson's *An Anthropology of Marxism*, which takes the "capitalocentrism" of Marxism to task for ignoring the thousands of years of socialist antecedents that predate the rise of capital. For example, Avery Gordon is fond of highlighting how the acts of the apostles "turned the world upside down" (*Anthropology of Marxism*, xiii), which is based on an earlier passage from the same scripture: "No one claimed ownership of private possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. . . . There was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:32–34). The socialist impulse can often be seen where people mass together to meet needs, share resources, tend to the soul, and sometimes respond forcefully to social injustice. It can be spotted in the Haitian, Mexican, Russian, Chinese, Algerian, Cuban, Nicaraguan, and Iranian Revolutions, all of which preceded or exceeded Marx's historical materialist conceits (119). And it can be witnessed in a clothing store in the middle of a landscape teeming with prisons and police. In the future, it just might grow and

gain ground from the smoldering remains of capital. But it certainly was there, beating and clasping hands, long before capital. It is here even now, all over, everywhere people are found, for those with eyes to see, ears to hear, souls to feel.

22 Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, x.

23 Robinson, *Anthropology of Marxism*, 1.

CHAPTER 1. OLD MAN TILLEY & THE LAND

1 Perhaps this mirroring of values and practices that were "biblical" had more to do with the fact that the US military was pointing rifles at them after stealing their homes and possessions.

CHAPTER 2. BIG TIM & MRS. TAYLOR

1 "As I sit in heaven and watch over you everyday [*sic*], I try to let you know with signs I never went away. I hear you when you're laughing, and watch you when you sleep. I even place my arms around you, to calm you as you weep. I see you wish the days away, begging to have me home. So I try to send you signs, so you know you're not alone. Don't feel guilty that you have life that was denied to me. Heaven is truly beautiful, just you wait and see. So live your life, be free and know with every breath you'll be taking one for me." Author unknown.

CHAPTER 3. THE CHIEF & BIGFOOT

1 See Arjun Shankar's introduction in *Brown Saviors and Their Others*, where he builds on Sara Ahmed's "sweaty concept" to explore the significance of nervous, sweaty anthropology, marked by the anthropologist's own bodily responses to the clash of encountering a world. Shankar, *Brown Saviors*, xiii–xiv, 250.

2 Gong, "Between Tolerant Containment and Concerted Constraint," 664–89.

3 Milenko Martinovich, "States with Right-to-Carry Concealed Handgun Laws Experience Increases in Violent Crime, According to Stanford Scholar," *Stanford Report*, June 21, 2017, https://news.stanford.edu/2017/06/21/violent-crime-increases-right-carry-states/.

4 Dave Collins and Lisa Marie Pane, "Police Loosen Standards for Accepting Recruits," Police1, November 14, 2016, https://www.police1.com/police-jobs-and-careers/articles/police-loosen-standards-for-accepting-recruits-3uCEoz8NBnvmy1G1/.