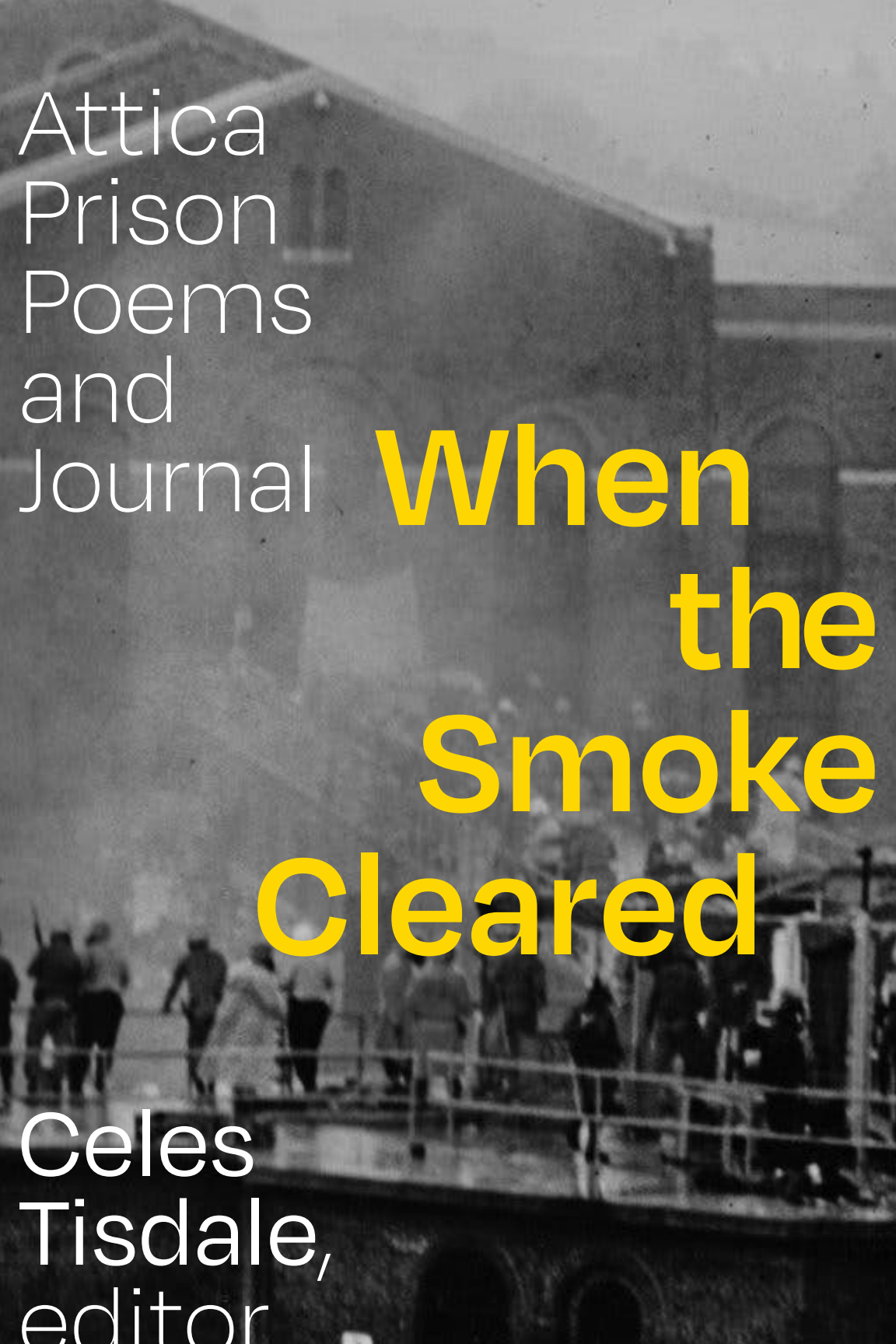

Attica Prison Poems and Journal

When the Smoke Cleared

Celes Tisdale, editor

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with an introduction by mark nowak

When the Smoke Cleared

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I dedicate this to my wife, Tujuana K. Tucker-Tisdale, without whose foresight and encouragement I could not have completed this offering. And to the men in the Attica Correctional Facility Writers Workshop, whose humanity surpassed much of what I have ever experienced, I dedicate this completion of my journey into their insight and creativity.

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Preface

It was a cool fall afternoon, Thursday, September 9, 1971. I was thirty years old, walking across the campus of State University College at Buffalo, having finished teaching a class in the English Department. The Vietnam War was still America's burden; the feminist movement was necessary; the Black Arts Movement spoke for African Americans' identity in the arts, politics, and reflections of Africa; and Black Power advocates were speaking loudly. The Woodstock Arts Festival of 1969 was a recent memory, as was the tumultuous 1968 Democratic National Convention. Affirmation or denial of philosophical positions among American citizens often spawned protests, as did Vietnam, women's liberation, and Black Power identity. President John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X had been assassinated, and fire hoses and dogs had been loosed on Black protesters for civil rights.

So on the cool fall afternoon of September 9, 1971, a student stopped me as I crossed the Buffalo State campus and asked, "Did you hear about the uprising at Attica State Prison?" And, as is said, the rest is history. One year later, I was at Attica Correctional Facility as the teacher of, I believe, the first poetry workshop in an American prison led by a noninmate and African American.

Discoveries in poetry were made by the men as I discovered how deep their humanity was and how their dignity and respect shone. For three years, 1972 to 1975, almost every Wednesday, I made the thirty-five-mile trip to Attica to do what I loved (and still love) deeply: teach literature, especially poetry.

In 1974, the first major Black-owned publishing house in America, Broadside Press in Detroit, Michigan, published *Betcha Ain't*, which contained the poetry of the workshop members and my journal. The men insisted that we try to get their poetry published, and I agreed, especially after the encouragement of Broadside Press's owner, Dudley Randall, and poet Gwendolyn Brooks in 1974.

In 1982, Gwendolyn Brooks sent me a letter asking my forgiveness for keeping my manuscript "Every Wednesday" so long for her evaluation and comments. The manuscript was intended as a follow-up publication to *Betcha Ain't* and was so titled because of my weekly visits to Attica on Wednesday evenings. She suggested that I publish it on my own if no publishing house accepted it. Further, she recalled in her letter our trip together from Buffalo, New York, to the Attica Correctional Facility Writers Workshop's Wednesday-evening session in 1974. In her profoundly poetic way, she did not mention the poetry workshop but commented on the "clean store" in which we had ice-cream cones during the journey.

Gwendolyn Brooks was the first African American Pulitzer Prize winner, receiving the award for poetry in 1950 for *Annie Allen* (1949), which tells, in poetry, about the life of an African American girl growing to adulthood and motherhood in Chicago. I was "adopted" by Gwendolyn Brooks, and we shared a friendship of more than twenty-five years until her death in 2000.

And here we are, some fifty years later, with the follow-up publication to *Betcha Ain't* now called *When the Smoke Cleared: Attica Prison Poems and Journal*. I encouraged the men to know their worth and take pride in their work, but more importantly, I wanted the world to know them as poets of pride and confidence in this offering.

Thank you for reading the hearts of these men, and remember just that: they are men of courage who brought the world into their sphere.

Remember this.

—Celes Tisdale

Introduction

Celes Tisdale's Poetry Workshop at Attica

Mark Nowak

Black smoke billows into the sky from inside the high prison walls. More than 1,300 rioting prisoners have set fire to the carpenter's shop and other buildings. Police officers armed with hand grenades, tear gas, rifles, machine guns, and shotguns keep the prisoners at bay, while terrified townspeople buy up every firearm and bullet at the local hardware store, then join the prison guards along the wall to keep the rebellious prisoners contained. Unlike the officers and the townspeople, the prisoners possess no firearms. Prisoners who survive the riot will later recount stories of buckshot wounds they sustained in the uprising. Several hours after it begins, prison guards, police, and armed local townspeople succeed in quelling the riot. Dead bodies are transported to the local morgue.

To those familiar with the Attica prison uprising that occurred between September 9 and September 13, 1971, many of these details might sound familiar. The story above, however, is about the Dannemora prison uprising in the Adirondack region of northern New York on July 22, 1929.[1]

Six days after the uprising at Dannemora, the incarcerated men at Auburn Prison, near the central New York city of Syracuse, lead another rebellion in which three prisoners and two prison guards are killed. The next day, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the governor of New York State, visits Dannemora; the following day, he visits Great Meadow Prison in Comstock, New York. After concluding his prison visits, FDR declares that the state must modernize its prisons in "a simple act of humanity." He continues, "The time has come when New York can no longer tolerate prisons like Dannemora and Auburn."[2]

Roosevelt was not, of course, preaching prison abolition. Yet, during his visits, he apparently saw some of what journalist Hastings H. Hart would describe, in the days after Roosevelt's visits, as the root causes of these New York State prison uprisings of 1929: overcrowding, scant wages for prison work, nearly inedible food, poorly trained prison staff, overly stern sentencing, indeterminate penal service, and more.[3] Conditions like these, it seems, have always been endemic to the carceral state.

Attica State Prison, or Attica Correctional Facility, as it was renamed in 1970, was born from the 1929 riots at Dannemora and Auburn. According to M. M. Wilmer, writing in the *New York Times* in January 1930, the riots made the construction of the new $12 million prison in the western New York village of Attica, thirty miles east of Buffalo, both necessary and urgent:

> If the succession of prison mutinies in this State have no other effect, they have directed an exceptional amount of attention to the new State prison under construction at Attica. . . . Whatever may be the outcome of the agitation, the immediate and practical answer to the convict revolts has been the new Attica prison. . . . The very slow progress that had been made toward building the institution before the riots contrasts with the energy that has been shown since those events.[4]

Some reporters in the months that followed would focus their stories on the daunting architecture of the fortresslike, soon-to-open prison in western New York. Attica, they wrote, had thirty-foot exterior walls and state-of-the-art keyless pneumatic locks. Other journalists, no doubt as balm for a nervous society or propaganda for Roosevelt's desire for prison reforms, called the new prison planned for Attica a "convict's paradise." Attica prisoners would soon be treated to spring beds, radios, and a cafeteria: "The village of Attica takes as much pride in [its new prison] as Niagara Falls does in its cataract, and Gettysburg its battlefield."[5] This comparison to the location of the military battle that resulted in the largest number of casualties in the Civil War would not age well.

Attica would see escapes, protests, and uprisings of its own soon after it received its first prisoner on July 1, 1931. Two and a half weeks later, Jesse S. Conklin, serving a ten-year term for forgery, became the first person to escape from Attica. Police arrested Conklin a week later after he stole a car in Wilawana, Pennsylvania.[6] Then, on the evening of De-

cember 6, 1932, the first reported uprising of Attica prisoners occurred. Guards used tear gas to extinguish the rebellion, though Warden William Hurt would later deny use of the gas. Hurt blamed the first uprising at Attica on new arrivals from Sing Sing and "a strong distaste among certain other convicts for pick and shovel work."[7] At the end of that same month, another uprising occurred. The warden again denied it. According to Hurt, "One shot of the [tear] gas ended the demonstration."[8] Smaller work stoppages, demonstrations, and mass legal actions occurred at Attica in the following decades, from a "sour milk sit-down strike" by more than seven hundred prisoners in 1957 to the filing of more than one hundred court actions in 1961 by Black Muslims who were demanding religious freedom at the prison. In 1962, five thousand prisoners from at least four New York State prisons found a way to organize a coordinated, multiprison sit-in over a parole bill.[9]

The uprising at Attica in September 1971, the deadliest prison uprising in U.S. history, did not occur in a vacuum. In 1970 and the first months of 1971, prisoners across the country organized and launched a wave of prison escapes, occupations, strikes, and riots.[10] The movement reached one of its nadirs on August 21, 1971, when two guards shot and killed George Jackson at San Quentin State Prison. The murder of Jackson, author of *Soledad Brother* and a field marshal for the Black Panther Party, had an immediate impact on prisoners across the United States. The following day at Attica, for example, prisoners wore black mourning bands and refused to speak or eat as they staged a "spiritual sit-in" for Jackson.[11]

On the morning of September 9, 1971, as Heather Ann Thompson writes in *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and Its Legacy*, nearly 1,300 prisoners took control of the prison's D Yard and transformed the yard into "an organized tent city with democratically elected representatives, a security force, a dining area, and a fairly well-equipped medical station."[12] The prisoners drafted a list of demands, a list influenced by the Attica Liberation Faction's "Manifesto of Demands and Anti-Depression Platform," which was inspired by a similar list written by prisoners at Folsom State Prison in California.[13] During the D Yard occupation, a prisoner spokesperson named L. D. Barkley, who was jailed at Attica for cashing a forged check and driving without a license, presented these demands to prison commissioner Russel G. Oswald and a

group of journalists from the *New York Times*, the *Buffalo News*, NBC, ABC, and elsewhere who had joined Oswald to meet the negotiating team. The demands addressed economic, educational, religious, and political grievances that were not unlike those of the rebellions at Dannemora and Auburn prisons in 1929. The Attica prisoners wanted the New York State minimum wage to be paid for their mandatory prison labor; they wanted true religious freedom and cessation of the censorship of their reading materials (newspapers, magazines, etc.); they wanted an overhaul of the prison educational system and, as the demands expanded in the following days, a vastly transformed prison library.

L. D. Barkley and many of his fellow Attica prisoners in the D Yard would never see these demands for prison justice realized. On the morning of September 13, at approximately 10:00 a.m., Oswald, with the backing of Governor Nelson Rockefeller, ordered the retaking of the prison. Military helicopters first blanketed D Yard with CS gas (which induces almost immediate nausea and vomiting and is banned by the Geneva Conventions). Then, more than 450 New York State troopers, Attica guards, and sheriffs from nearby counties stormed the prison; they fired more than 4,500 rounds that included shotgun pellets and dumdum bullets (also outlawed by the Geneva Conventions).[14] They killed thirty-two prisoners and ten prison guards being held as hostages. An autopsy would find that L. D. Barkley was shot in the back—not during this initial assault, but later at close range. The bullet, "a badly fragmented jacketed bullet of slightly greater than 25 caliber," had lodged in the fourth rib on Barkley's right side and punctured his right lung. According to prisoners, as well as New York State assemblyman Arthur Eve, who had been part of the negotiating team, Barkley had been alive more than an hour after troops had taken control of the prison.[15]

Why did wages for prison labor become a central demand during both the 1929 and 1971 uprisings? Why did L. D. Barkley and his fellow Attica prisoners include in their list of demands a new educational model for prison classes? In the small number of classes already taught at prisons across New York State at the time, almost exclusively by white male teachers, lessons only reinforced the disjunct in the lived experience of Black life under white state surveillance that the prisoners experienced in their lives both inside and outside of Attica. A few of the white male teachers in the New York State prison system, it should be noted, also

spoke out about the blatant racism of the white male prison guards and the prison education system in general. John Calhoun taught art at Eastern New York Correctional Facility in the Catskills town of Napanoch, where prisoners staged a memorial protest for their brothers at Attica. Prior to earning his art degree from the State University of New York, Calhoun had worked as a prison guard.[16] He spoke directly about the racism of the guards at prisons in New York:

> You see correctional officers walking around with their metal American flags. . . . Well, every American is entitled to show the flag. But that's not why they're wearing it. It's like every American is entitled to a sheet, but when he slits it and puts it over his head, then I know what he's thinking.[17]

Barkley and his fellow prisoners at Attica made trade union demands, Black Power movement demands, and abolitionist demands; they demanded new libraries and new teaching practices, class offerings, and teachers; they demanded uncensored books and magazines. They did not put their lives on the line in September 1971 for minor tweaks to the prison system.

Eight months after the brutal end of the Attica uprising, Celes Tisdale, a Black poet, new father, and professor at Buffalo State College, stepped through the front gates of Attica Correctional Facility. In his leather briefcase, which cleared security, he carried several books with poems by his favorite poets. One of these poems, Langston Hughes's "Ballad of the Landlord," spoke about a Black apartment tenant who is given ninety days in jail for refusing to pay rent until his landlord fixes his dilapidated apartment. Black life, Hughes's poem suggests, had long been linked with state incarceration. Tisdale described his initial impressions of Attica in his journal on the first day of his poetry workshop on May 24, 1972. The first words he writes about his arrival at Attica capture the mood at the prison: "The air is hot, still, restless." When I asked him what he most remembered about that first day at Attica, he answered with just one sentence: "You could still smell the smoke."[18]

Celes Tisdale was born on July 31, 1941, in Salters, South Carolina, a small farming community about seventy miles north of Charleston.[19] He was delivered by a midwife named Auntie Nellie, his grandmother once told him, who smoked a corncob pipe. His father, Norman Tisdale,

worked with Celes's grandfather Paul Tisdale as a sharecropper. Shortly after Celes was born, his father and mother moved the family to Buffalo, New York, where Tisdale's five younger siblings would later be born. Tisdale credits his mother, Rachel, for his early love of poetry: "My mother was more of an artistic type. She liked poetry and read poetry to me, especially the poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar." Norman Tisdale's uncle worked at Semet-Solvay, a coke oven plant in the north Buffalo industrial suburb of Tonawanda, and he got Norman a job there as a coke handler.

In 1942, after living with Norman's uncle Christopher Barr for a brief period, the expanding Tisdale family moved into a new apartment in Willert Park Courts on Buffalo's East Side. Tisdale remembers those days fondly. "There was a park where we played basketball right there, in the projects. There was a wading pool." Ishmael Reed was his next-door neighbor.[20] A library was part of the housing complex, too, "in the basement where we paid our rent," as Tisdale recalls. "And that's where I spent a lot of my time. I was a voracious reader." All this time in the library earned him his childhood nickname: "The Professor." More than fifty years after he last lived there, the abandoned Willert Park Courts have been placed on the National Trust for Historic Preservation's list of "11 Most Endangered Places." The trust describes Willert Park as "one of the first garden/courtyard housing projects in the nation"; it also cites its "distinctive bas-relief sculptures depicting scenes of African American life and achievement . . . developed in cooperation with the first residents of the complex."[21]

Tisdale attended Public School 31 and Seneca Vocational High School. His dream was to become an electrician because he had a passion for the emerging medium of television. As he neared his high school graduation in 1959, Tisdale hoped to train for his future career in the air force. But his guidance counselor at Seneca noticed his outstanding grades (especially in English and history) and helped him get into Buffalo State College on Buffalo's West Side. He remembers being one of only two Black English majors on the campus. During his college years, Tisdale worked at Willert Park Drugs and the Panama Lunch (known locally as Smitty's restaurant after its owner, Alfred Smith). He worked in the kitchen every Sunday from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. for $20, and through these two jobs, he paid for his college education. Tisdale earned a BA in English in 1963,

then returned to PS 31 as an English teacher. He would also earn an MA in English from Buffalo State in 1969 and continue his PhD studies at the University of Buffalo.

During the 1960s, Tisdale began participating in the burgeoning arts scene in Buffalo's Black community. He became a member of the Buffalo Black Drama Workshop, founded by director Ed Smith, who had moved to Buffalo from Philadelphia. Tisdale also founded the Nia Writers Workshop (*Nia* from the Swahili word for intention or purpose). During this time, Tisdale performed extensively in regional Black theater productions, and he wrote and performed his own poetry inspired by Black Arts Movement poets like Amiri Baraka and Sonia Sanchez, Beat poets like Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and of course his mother's favorite poet, Paul Laurence Dunbar.

A few months after the Attica uprising, Randy Lerner, an arts administrator at Hospital Audiences Inc., a nonprofit based in New York City, approached the Black Drama Workshop about an idea for a new program. Hospital Audiences wanted to offer a creative writing workshop at Attica, and Lerner recruited Tisdale from the Black Drama Workshop to lead the program. Tisdale remembers sitting on his porch on the afternoon of his first trip to Attica and trying to imagine what it would be like to enter the prison he had seen almost daily the previous fall on the cover of the *Buffalo Evening News*. After Lerner picked him up, they made the thirty-five-mile drive to Attica together. The history of this day and all of Tisdale's Attica poetry workshop classes is documented in his journal.

The poems and journal entries in *When the Smoke Cleared* are published here as Tisdale had intended in the 1970s: the original poems from *Betcha Ain't: Poems from Attica*, edited by Tisdale and originally published in 1974 by Dudley Randall's Detroit-based Broadside Press, one of the most important publishing houses for Black literature in the twentieth century; Tisdale's journal from *Betcha Ain't* with an additional thirty-nine journal entries not included in the original volume; and twenty previously unpublished Attica poems from Tisdale's personal archive, originally collected in a second manuscript titled "Every Wednesday" (named after the day of his weekly workshop at Attica).[22] These poems and expanded journal entries are published here together for the first time, fifty years after they were first written.

Betcha Ain't was the first Black Arts Movement prison anthology dedicated solely to poetry to be published in the United States. Tisdale's journal tells the story from that first night of the Attica workshop on May 24, 1972, when, he writes, "I recognize[d] some of [my students] from the old days in Willert Park Projects and Smitty's restaurant," to his return to Attica on June 12, 1974, with copies of *Betcha Ain't* in hand to give to the workshop participants who were still at Attica (some participants had been transferred to other prisons or released). In one of the earliest journal entries, from June 7, 1972—one that was not included in *Betcha Ain't* but is published here for the first time—Tisdale describes the workshop participants' excitement as they discuss the news that prison abolitionist Angela Davis had been found not guilty in the Marin County Civic Center kidnapping trial.[23] Tisdale says he chose not to get "involved in a political discussion" with his students—in part because guards were often present in the sessions and, as leader of this brand-new program, Tisdale was concerned about his Attica workshop being censored or canceled. Instead, he funneled the discussion of Davis's release through poetry, asking his students to read and discuss Nikki Giovanni's "Poem of Angela Yvonne Davis." While overt political discussions might raise suspicions in prison guards and administrators, who would be suspicious of a small group of students sitting around a table and talking about a poem?

In another previously unpublished entry, Tisdale writes on July 20, 1972, about the cancellation of his poetry workshop after Superintendent Ernest L. Montanye declared a state of emergency at the prison. According to Tisdale, approximately nine hundred prisoners refused to leave their cells due to the termination of a nurse, and their protest successfully led to the nurse being reinstated. In the same entry, Tisdale mentions his workshop students' desire to publish a book. He also writes that Randy Lerner, from the sponsoring organization, Hospital Audiences Inc., became "very apprehensive" about continuing the poetry workshop after this initial eight-week session because "many prisoners' protests continue." Although it is not included in his journal, Tisdale did corroborate a story in the *New York Times* that mentions his workshop in relation to another post-1971 protest at Attica.[24] On November 7, 1972, students in Tisdale's workshop read poems as part of a Black Solidarity Day program at Attica, which, the *New York Times* stated, included "a series of talks by prisoners, staff members of the prison and a volunteer director of a

black poetry workshop at the prison." The article quotes Superintendent Montanye: "'Some of the talks were fairly militant,' Mr. Montanye said, 'and a few of the prisoners may have misinterpreted them.'"[25] The following afternoon, fifty prisoners "joined hands and shouted slogans in the exercise yard." Prison officials immediately removed the guards from the yard. Approximately thirty guards in riot gear—armed with tear gas, shotguns, and batons—then headed to the roof atop the prison corridor from which shooting the previous year had commenced. According to the newspaper story, Montanye spoke to the protesters in the exercise yard through a bullhorn to eventually defuse the situation—this time without the use of tear gas and gunfire.[26] These two stories from the summer and fall of 1972 give just a small glimpse into the tense conditions at Attica during the time of Tisdale's workshop.

Tisdale's journal entries give readers a unique opportunity to experience what it was like to enter Attica as a poet-educator and to return, week after week, to discuss poetry with the participants in his workshop. In one particularly insightful entry from March 14, 1973, also published here for the first time, Tisdale discusses the workshop's precarity. Just ten months after it started, funding for the Attica program through the Black Drama Workshop had been cut, and attendance had dropped to only three writers, "two of whom were new"—a problem Tisdale assigned to "administrative laxity." Yet even during what he believed on that particular Wednesday night to be "maybe [the] last eight-week session," Tisdale finds hope. He introduces his participants to the "Tis-O-Gram" (see appendix), an exercise Tisdale invented to help his students convert abstract ideas and emotions into concrete examples—the classic "show, don't tell" mantra of creative writing teachers everywhere.

The Tis-O-Gram uses a grid system. In the leftmost column, Tisdale lists more than twenty abstract ideas: love, hate, fear, disappointment, pain, trust, poverty, violence, and so on. Then, across the grid in separate columns Tisdale asks his students to provide an example of what each of these abstract ideas "looks like," "smells like," "tastes like," "sounds like," and "feels like (to touch)" and what "color" it is. A note at the bottom of the Tis-O-Gram instructs: "Responses should be one word; no response should be used more than once." The Tis-O-Gram encourages beginning writers like his students at Attica to use a wide range of concrete imagery, colors, shapes, smells, and sounds in their poems. Does

fear sound like breaking glass or someone slamming a door? Does *joy* smell like pancakes or a paycheck? Is *anxiety* deep purple or lemon yellow? With the Tis-O-Gram, Tisdale sought a method for helping those who had lived through the Attica uprising to turn their experiences into vivid, well-crafted, and compelling poems.

In addition to the Tis-O-Gram, Tisdale brought the rich history of Black poetry to his workshop at Attica. During the second eight-week session, for example, students read and analyzed poems in *The Black Poets*, an anthology edited by Dudley Randall and published the previous year (the year of the Attica uprising). Randall's comprehensive anthology begins with "Folk Poetry" (which Randall divides into "Folk Seculars" and "Spirituals"), then transitions into "Literary Poetry" with early Black writers such as Phillis Wheatley, James Weldon Johnson, and Celes Tisdale's mother's favorite poet, Paul Laurence Dunbar. Further sections cover the Harlem Renaissance, the Post-Renaissance, and the Black Arts Movement poets of the 1960s.[27] Tisdale supplemented this last section by playing albums by poets of the Black Arts Movement including Nikki Giovanni (*Truth Is on Its Way*), Amiri Baraka (whose album *It's Nation Time* was released during the first year of Tisdale's workshop), and The Last Poets (*The Last Poets*).[28]

Through these exercises and examples, both textual and musical, Tisdale joined an emerging movement of Black writers in the early 1970s who were seeking to establish a Black literary history and Black Arts Movement pedagogy specific to poetry writing. For example, *A Capsule Course in Black Poetry Writing*, originally scheduled to be published by Broadside Press in late 1971, collects essays by Gwendolyn Brooks, Keorapetse Kgositsile, Haki R. Madhubuti, and Dudley Randall.[29] As Randall writes in his brief introduction to *A Capsule Course*, "This handbook grew out of a suggestion by Gwendolyn Brooks that she compose a small textbook on writing poetry." The idea eventually expanded to include essays by other poets, an idea about which Randall claims he was "doubtful" (due to potentially contradictory writing advice). Randall summarizes the audience for this book as "beginning Black poets": "This is not a book for experienced writers. Only the rudiments of poetry are discussed."[30]

While Randall's summary holds true for Madhubuti's contribution as well as his own, the essays by Brooks and Kgositsile reach beyond introductory discussions of alliteration, rhythm, publishing, et cetera for

beginners. In her contribution to *A Capsule Course*, Brooks urges new writers to subscribe to a new ideal: "The new black ideal italicizes black identity, black solidarity, black self-possession and self-address."[31] As she continues in a section that parallels many of the themes of poems collected in *When the Smoke Cleared*: "1966. 1967. 1968. Years of explosion. In those years a young black with pen in hand responded not to pretty sunsets and the lapping of lake water but to the speech of physical riot and spiritual rebellion." Later in the same passage, Brooks adds, "Sometimes the literature seemed to issue from pens dipped in, *stabbed* in, writhing blood."[32] In the final section of her essay, headed "A Few Hints toward the Making of Poetry," Brooks urges new poets to bring their personal histories into the poem. In one illuminating passage, she writes:

> If you allude to a star, say precisely what that star means to *you.* If you feature a garden, speak of that garden *most personally*. If you have murdered in a garden, the grass and flowers (and weeds) will mean something different to you than to someone who has only planted or picked.[33]

Brooks, who won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry and taught poetry workshops with the Blackstone Rangers, invokes craft within a radical political context, radical politics with an aesthetic context, and the conjunction of craft and politics within the context of an emerging radical Black tradition in poetry pedagogy.[34]

Like Brooks, Kgositsile describes the very act of the study of creative writing as a deeply political practice. He asks, early in his essay in this primer for new Black poets, "How can you have a revolutionary literature without a revolution to form and inform, to shape and strengthen a writer's sensibility?"[35] This sentiment, of course, is far from the aesthetic of almost every poetry handbook of the times (or of today). He calls on the new Black writer to be a documentarian, a historian, a reporter: "If there is any validity to the making of a black poetry, as in the making in any other attempts in any other areas of our lives, the poetry has to explore and report exactly where we are." He calls out a need for "exposé-poems," poems that "report on and explore the tragedy of our times."[36] In this way, his insights echo C. L. R. James and Grace Lee Boggs's invocation to writers to "recognize and record."[37] In Brooks's and Kgositsile's essays in *A Capsule Course*, we find the central notion that radical politics

conjoined to the documentation of everyday life must remain at the center of any new Black poet's practice.

In her introduction to *The New Abolitionists: (Neo)Slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings*, Joy James expands on this idea by asserting that imprisoned Black writers, like the poets collected in *When the Smoke Cleared*, "function as progressive abolitionists and register as 'people's historians.' They become the storytellers of the political histories of the captives *and* their captors. These narratives are generally the 'unauthorized' versions of political life, often focusing on dissent and policing and repression."[38] The poets collected here, in James's terms, serve as the "people's historians" of the Attica prison uprising, men who experienced firsthand the events of September 9–13, 1971, and turned to poetry to write about that moment. These poets report on Black life in a prison monitored exclusively by white guards and a white administration. They also "recognize and record," more generally, Black life in America in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The poets who attended Tisdale's workshop tell their version of the history of the Attica uprising throughout *When the Smoke Cleared*. Isaiah Hawkins's "13th of Genocide" documents September 13, 1971, by using six four-line stanzas to chronicle the day when "the white folks were coming / to lay some black brothers away." He describes how white state troopers and white sheriffs "from eight surrounding counties" amassed outside the walls of Attica on that day. Their message, Hawkins says, was clear:

> The word was kill niggers,
> kill all you can
> For they don't have the right
> to live like men.

Hawkins's people's history in poetic form is supported by outside sources. A year after the uprising, for example, one journalist reported that when the hundreds of state police officers ("not one who was black") stormed Attica and surged into D Yard the previous year, they were chanting, "White power, white power."[39]

Hawkins uses an array of poetic tools and devices that he learned about in Tisdale's workshop to describe and analyze this racism and police brutality through poetry: slant rhyme in the second and fourth lines

of the stanza quoted above (can/men); the metaphor of a big green bird that represents the two state police helicopters, one of which flew over the prison and announced an order to surrender just moments before a second helicopter began to spray CS gas across D Yard as the prison takeover began. Hawkins's "big green bird"—a *Time* magazine article on the uprising called them "Viet Nam–style helicopters"[40]—speaks with a human voice:

> "Put your hands on your heads
> and you won't get hurt,
> lie on your bellies,
> put your face in the dirt."

Finally, Hawkins echoes Claude McKay's most famous poem, "If We Must Die," in the final stanza of his poem. Hawkins's narrator hears "a black brother's cry" in the distance as the massacre unfolds: "I'm a man, white folks, and like a man I'll die." Two weeks after the uprising, *Time* magazine mistakenly assigned the authorship of McKay's poem, which was found in the rubble after D Yard was cleared, to one of the prisoners. In a follow-up letter to the editor, Gwendolyn Brooks corrected the magazine's error.[41]

Rather than rhyming stanzas, a poem by Mshaka (Willie Monroe), "Formula for Attica Repeats," uses a jagged, stepped free verse line to narrate the day of the massacre.[42] Mshaka's analysis of the events of September 13, 1971, focuses on the violent moments after the uprising and the potential for political change in the future. For Mshaka, "when / the smoke cleared" signals the moment when the true brutality of the carceral system and the racism of the prison guards is unleashed upon the prisoners. In the minutes and hours after state forces took D Yard, prison guards stripped the surviving prisoners (also removing their eyeglasses and dentures) and forced them to run through a fifty-yard "gauntlet" where officers would beat the prisoners with "ax handles, 2 x 4s, baseball bats and rifle butts."[43] Mshaka accuses the guards of being refusers "of S.O.S. Collect Calls" and, in the end, the prisoners' "Executioner[s]." Despite this atrocity, despite the prison spokespeople and police who came as "tearless / tremblers" to deliver "state-prepared speeches" and other misinformation about the massacre, Mshaka sees in "the 43 dead men" the potential to again rise up for their dignity, for their

demands, and even for the possibility of the eventual abolition of the oppressive system itself.

Of course, not every poem in *When the Smoke Cleared* is a documentary history of the uprising. Many other poems collected here reach beyond life in prison. L. Alexander Brooks's fantastical ballad, "The Odyssey of Louie Fats," is a story about love and desire set in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Brooks and Harold E. Packwood write haiku, a three-line Japanese poetic form with a strict syllable count (5–7–5), while Packwood also employs a French poetic form, the cinquain (a five-line poem). Tisdale taught these forms to the poets in his workshop. Joseph Hardy ("Synopsis of a Hummingbird") and Christopher Sutherland ("The End of Summer") write about a more pastoral life, too.

Black music, particularly jazz, is also a frequent theme. The poets in Tisdale's workshop invoke jazz musicians such as Sun Ra, John Coltrane, and Miles Davis in several poems. As Tisdale mentions in a journal entry of July 5, 1972, his students that day were thrilled to have seen tenor saxophone legend Archie Shepp perform at Attica the previous night (Shepp's classic album *Attica Blues* was released that same year). Shepp was, as Amiri Baraka called him a few years earlier, "a tenor man of the new jazz, who came out of an American background of Black slums and white palaces. He is a Marxist playwrighting tenor-saxophone player now. . . . You hear in Archie's music moans that are pleas for understanding."[44] Christopher Sutherland heard Shepp's "pleas for understanding" when Shepp performed at Attica on the Fourth of July, aka "Independence Day," and Sutherland turned the inspiration of Shepp's performance into a poem that first appears in this volume, "Applause to Archie Shepp & Co."[45] For Sutherland, Shepp's moans and pleas are inscribed as a "rhythmic hope message." Similarly, in his poem "'Olé,'" Harold E. Packwood, who was also a saxophone player, conjures the "blasting horns" of John Coltrane, Eric Dolphy, and Miles Davis as well as the "cosmic/chord" struck by Sun Ra.

Other poems speak more generally about the Black revolutionary politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s. John Lee Norris's "/PRISON POETS/," published here for the first time, exemplifies the influence of the Black Arts Movement in the Attica workshop. Norris places the all-caps title to his poem between two slashes; even Norris's title is visually between or behind bars.[46] Readers of Norris's poem might hear echoes of

Baraka's "Black Art," mentioned by many literary critics as one of the more important poems of the Black Arts Movement and a poem that Tisdale taught in his Attica workshop.[47] William J. Harris, in *The Poetry and Poetics of Amiri Baraka: The Jazz Aesthetic*, asserts that in "Black Art" Baraka wanted to write a new kind of poem that "had to be an active agent, not a vehicle of escape to 'another world.'"[48] Baraka spoke in a similar way in his autobiography: "I wanted to go 'beyond' poetry. I wanted to write some kind of action literature."[49]

Baraka famously begins "Black Art" by declaring: "Poems are bullshit unless they are / Teeth or trees or lemons piled / On a step." Norris similarly uses the image of teeth in his opening lines, stating that "black / poems / about / prisons / should have teeth that bite." Violence against oppressors (cops, prison guards, the racist state, etc.) forms a clear theme in both poems. In "Black Art," Baraka calls for

> Assassin poems, Poems that shoot
> Guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys
> And take their weapons leaving them dead
> With tongues pulled out and sent to Ireland.

The teeth of Norris's opening lines also become active agents: "black / poets / in / prisons should bite ass." Norris's poem, of course, doesn't have the sweeping arc of Baraka's "Black Art" and its concluding callout to "poems & poets & / All the loveliness here in the world." Norris, writing from inside Attica, ends his poem more abruptly, invoking active agents (i.e., the prison poets of the title) who will work to eradicate the systems of prison sublimation. Black poets in prison, as he writes in his concluding lines, need to "pile / zebra / stripes / bodiesbetweenthelines."

While important literary studies of the Black Arts Movement and several of its central writers (particularly Amiri Baraka) have been published to date, few studies have examined the role of the Black Arts Movement aesthetic in prison writing workshops during this period.[50] *Who Took the Weight? Black Voices from Norfolk Prison*, for example, displays the ways prison writing workshops taught by Black writers and teachers expanded notions of craft, politics, pedagogy, and poetic practice.[51] *Who Took the Weight?* collects poems, essays, stories, and plays from ten prisoners who enrolled in Elma Lewis's Technical Theater Training Program at Massachusetts Correctional Institution at Norfolk (dubbed the Norfolk Penal

Colony by those it incarcerated). The volume was edited by an anonymous group of workshop members calling itself the Norfolk Prison Brothers and was published in 1972, the year that Tisdale began his workshop at Attica.

The Norfolk workshop participants invited Lewis to the prison, as she writes in her foreword, because they felt a need "for an education about the black experience" that they had failed to receive both in the schools they attended and from the few educational programs at the prison.[52] They saw programs on Black history and Black arts as essential not only for their time in prison, Lewis writes, but for a time when they returned to their communities, too:

> They would like their children, their brothers, their sisters, their mothers and fathers to sidestep the trap before it's sprung. They teach the development of alternatives. They no longer see through a glass darkly. They would like to see their communities move toward ownership and control. They hope to pass along the revelation to blacks in all black communities.[53]

Like Black Arts Movement poets, the prisoners who occupied D Yard at Attica in September 1971, and people in Black communities across the United States, the writers in Lewis's Norfolk prison workshop sought, through their education, to be able to learn for themselves and teach others in their communities about self-determination and solidarity, about alternatives and ownership, about community control and creative writing, too.[54]

Similar to the poems created in Tisdale's workshop, the poems, plays, short stories, and essays collected in *Who Took the Weight?* address a wide range of political, cultural, and social concerns. The book opens with a dedication: "To Jonathan Jackson and the Soledad Brothers & to the brothers in Attica, who gave their lives in order for us to live! a little longer." The opening poem by Sayif, for example, interlaces Muslim spirituality and Black music. Juno Bakali Tshombe / Craig Dee Anderson's "Attempt—or The Reason Why the Revolution / Is Getting Off to a Bad Start," the next poem in the anthology, alludes to the cosmic jazz so prevalent in the early 1970s in its references to "black rhythm," "cosmic rays of black solidarity," and "a universal plane / of black corrective thinking."[55] Like Tisdale's anthology, *Who Took the Weight?* includes a wide

range of poetic styles: love poems, jazz/bop-inspired free verse, rhyming stanzas, polemical tracts, and so on. However, there is significantly less attention to traditional poetic forms like the haiku, cinquain, and ballad that Tisdale taught.

Lewis's workshop at Massachusetts Correctional Institution at Norfolk not only created a space for Black prisoners to write creatively and produce dramatic works; her workshop gave Black prisoners a vehicle for creating an alternative educational space for Black political and creative transformation. In his essay "Psychological Warfare at Norfolk Prison Camp," Juno Bakali Tshombe / Craig Dee Anderson summarizes the vital lifeline provided by prison workshops like this one:

> There is no program other than Elma Lewis's here that is working towards attaining some degree of thinking and a positive direction that will relate to the confined black prisoner and offer him a productive analysis needed for self-awareness and racial awareness. . . .
>
> Clearly the administration is thinking in terms of "let them niggers put on some plays describing their condition to each other or write poetry that no one gives a damn about, but under no circumstances whatsoever let them produce anything with any political overtones." This is what the European settler's prison system is bent on beating back into the furthest regions of the black prisoner's psyche, for it is here that the black man encounters the extreme in white racist persecution. Here the guard dog is in an environment that refuses to check his racism unless there is one of those "mild investigations" going on.[56]

Prison writing workshops of the early 1970s, however, did create a space for what Robin D. G. Kelley calls the "black radical imagination."[57] They created spaces for writing with "political overtones"; they became a vehicle for Black prisoners to, as Joy James said, "become the storytellers of the political histories of the captives *and* their captors."[58] And the racism, violence, and brutality of these captors certainly wasn't an image that those who controlled the system wanted in public view. Yet the poetry workshops and the anthologies that came out of them became a way for the prisoners' writings about the carceral state's racist, dehumanizing, and brutal history to be published for all to read.

In the end, however, no writers other than the poets included here have collectively documented their personal experiences during the At-

tica uprising through poetry.[59] This is what makes the poems in *When the Smoke Cleared* so unique. Hersey Boyer's "Attica Reflections" documents prisoners like himself weeping in "the silence / Of midnights" in the aftermath of the retaking of the prison. "They have witnessed the slaughter," he writes, yet he has also seen the white prison guards sing "songs of merriment" as they "filled [their] cups with blood" in the running of the gauntlet and other forms of violence in which the guards engaged after they secured the prison.[60] Daniel Brown uses the image of tears, too, as he wishes that tears could be empowered with agency: "If tears could destroy, / Our plight would cease."

Sam Washington repeats a pair of questions in the first three lines of each of the five stanzas in his poem "Was It Necessary": "Was it really necessary? / Did they really have to carry / Rifles and shotguns?"—questions we continue to ask in our current uprisings against the police murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Daunte Wright, and other unarmed Black people across the United States. In the opening stanza, Washington's narrator sarcastically replies, "Let's ask the gov', / Who's so full of love!," and this refrain is repeated as the closing couplet of all but the last stanza. In other lines, the narrator asks why such heavy artillery was used "Against sticks and knives!" Was it really necessary, Washington asks, to shoot "with intent to kill! / . . . even when they lay still!" He conveys his utter disdain for Governor Rockefeller, who refused to come to Attica during the uprising to speak with the prisoners or the negotiating team: "While troopers were killing with hate and glee, / Rock was safe in Albany!"

Finally, John Lee Norris's poem "Just Another Page," written from the perspective of the one-year anniversary of the Attica uprising, uses anaphora (the repetition of words at the beginning of a poetic line) to build from a flat, direct opening pair of lines ("A year later / And it's just another page") into a crescendo that viscerally inscribes the entirety of the Attica prison system and the racist government that oversees it:

> And Attica is a maggot-minded black blood sucker
> And the only thing they do right is wrong
> And another page of history is written in black blood
> And old black mamas pay taxes to buy guns that killed their sons
> And the consequence of being free . . . is death

But Norris doesn't ask for "your sympathy and tears" because, as he writes in the next line of his poem, those tears "always come too late." Instead, Norris urges action, abolition, radical change.

Sam Washington, John Lee Norris, and all the poets included in *When the Smoke Cleared* have declared themselves in these pages to be something more than simply prisoners incarcerated at Attica; they are poets, people's historians, husbands, documentarists, fathers, artists, brothers, uncles, and more. This book is meant to showcase their poetic achievements, their desire for self-determination, and their historical role as "the storytellers of the political histories of the captives *and* their captors" before, during, and after the Attica uprising.[61] Harold E. Packwood, in a letter he wrote to Tisdale from the prison on October 13, 1972, describes the deep impact of the poetry workshop on its participants: "Since the Workshop began, I have seen brothers' characters change, as well as their poetry. We have become more conscious of one another, and we've come closer together. Upon poetry we have built a common bond which will be hard to break."[62] As you read through the poems, remember this new space of radical Black creativity and solidarity that Celes Tisdale's poetry workshop created inside Attica Correctional Facility just a few months after the smoke cleared.

NOTES

1. Details in the opening paragraphs are taken from "3 Convicts Killed, 20 Hurt, 1,300 Riot at Dannemora," *New York Times*, July 23, 1929, 1.

2. "Roosevelt Urges Modern Prisons," *New York Times*, July 31, 1929, 1.

3. Hastings H. Hart, "What Lies behind the Outbreaks in Prisons," *New York Times*, August 4, 1929, 4.

4. M. M. Wilner, "New Attica Prison to Cost $12 Million," *New York Times*, January 26, 1930, 51.

5. "Attica Prison to Be Convicts' Paradise," *New York Times*, August 2, 1931, E5.

6. "Held for Attica Escape: Man Seized in Pennsylvania Said to Be First to Flee New Prison," *New York Times*, July 30, 1931, 20.

7. "Attica Convicts Riot; Damage Is Reported," *New York Times*, December 8, 1932, 13.

8. "Attica Prison Row Quelled by Tear Gas," *New York Times*, December 30, 1932, 8.

9. For the 1957 strike, see "'Sit-Down' in Prison: Attica Convicts Charge

They Were Given Sour Milk," *New York Times*, June 20, 1957, 22. For more on the Muslim lawsuits, see "Muslim Negroes Suing the State," *New York Times*, March 16, 1961, 1. For the coordinated strike of 1962, see "5,000 Prisoners Strike in State: Convicts at 4 Prisons Stage Sit-In over Parole Bill," *New York Times*, March 13, 1962, 32. And for a comprehensive historical account of the Attica prison uprising, see Heather Ann Thompson's Pulitzer Prize–winning book *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and Its Legacy* (New York: Pantheon, 2016).

10. A detailed list of prison escapes, occupations, strikes, and riots in 1970–71 can be found on the website of the *Abolitionist*: "Prison Struggle 1970–1," March 9, 2012, https://abolitionistpaper.wordpress.com/2012/03/09/prison-struggle-1970-1-5/.

11. Thompson, *Blood in the Water*, 35–36.

12. Thompson, *Blood in the Water*, 69.

13. The Attica Liberation Faction's list of demands is printed in Samuel Melville, *Letters from Attica* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1972), 175–81.

14. Jeff Z. Klein, "The Attica Prison Uprising—43 Dead and a Four-Decade Cover-Up," NPR, September 10, 2018, https://news.wbfo.org/post/heritage-moments-attica-prison-uprising-43-dead-and-four-decade-cover.

15. Thompson, *Blood in the Water*, 238.

16. "Prisoners Exhibit Paintings at New York Art Show," *Federal Probation: A Journal of Correctional Philosophy and Practice* 34, no. 1 (March 1970): 83.

17. Fred Ferretti, "Tension in Catskill Prison," *New York Times*, September 22, 1971, 51.

18. Interview with the author, September 12, 2019. I wrote briefly about Celes Tisdale's *Betcha Ain't: Poems from Attica* in my essay "Panthers, Patriots, and Poets in Revolution," published in *Organize Your Own: The Politics and Poetics of Self-Determination Movements*, ed. Anthony Romero (Chicago: Soberscove Press, 2016), 26–46. I was unable to locate Celes at that time. Materials from this essay eventually made it into a section on Celes Tisdale's Attica workshop in my book *Social Poetics* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2020). I was eventually able to get a current phone number for Tisdale from poet and professor Gene Grabiner (who took a poetry workshop I was facilitating with the Western New York Council on Occupational Safety and Health at the Just Buffalo Literary Center). Grabiner and Tisdale had been colleagues at Erie Community College. After several phone conversations, Celes invited me to his home in Georgia to read the previously unpublished materials he had in his archives. This first meeting at his house in Augusta occurred on September 12, 2019, exactly forty-seven years after the uprising. We have

continued to speak regularly since then as we worked on the publication of this book.

19. Tisdale's biographical information in this introduction is taken from a series of interviews and phone conversations we had between August 2019 and the time this book went to press in 2022.

20. Reed is the author of more than thirty award-winning novels, poetry volumes, and essay collections. His family lived at Willert Park Courts from its opening in 1937 until Reed's seventh-grade year. See "Ishmael Reed," Just Buffalo Literary Center, accessed January 13, 2022, https://www.justbuffalo.org/community/lit-city/ishmael-reed/. See also Nicola Paladin and Giorgio Rimondi, eds., *Una bussola per l'infosfera con Ishmael Reed tra musica e letteratura* (Milan: Agenzia X, 2017), which includes "Da Willert Park Courts a Palazzo Leoni Montanari," an address by Ishmael Reed (27–39).

21. "Press Release: Willert Park Courts," Preservation Buffalo Niagara, May 30, 2019, https://preservationbuffaloniagara.org/blog-post/press-release-willert-park-courts/.

22. For more on the history of Broadside Press, see Melba Joyce Boyd, *Wrestling with the Muse: Dudley Randall and the Broadside Press* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

23. Philip Hager, "Angela Davis Not Guilty, Jury Finds," *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 1972, 1.

24. Conversation with the author, May 29, 2020.

25. "50 Inmates of Attica Cause a Brief Disturbance," *New York Times*, November 10, 1972, 43.

26. "50 Inmates of Attica Cause a Brief Disturbance," 43.

27. Dudley Randall, ed., *The Black Poets* (New York: Bantam Press, 1971).

28. A file in Tisdale's archive lists him playing the Nikki Giovanni album in his class on August 23, 1972; Amiri Baraka on September 27, 1972; and The Last Poets on October 4, 1972.

29. As Randall writes in the introduction, "Some of the writers failed to meet the original deadline of December 1, 1971. The publication was delayed until 1975. Dudley Randall, introduction to *A Capsule Course in Black Poetry Writing* by Gwendolyn Brooks, Keorapetse Kgositsile, Haki R. Madhubuti, and Dudley Randall (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1975), 1.

30. Randall, introduction, 1.

31. Gwendolyn Brooks, untitled essay in Brooks et al., *A Capsule Course*, 3.

32. Brooks, in *A Capsule Course*, 4.

33. Brooks, in *A Capsule Course*, 10.

34. For more on the Blackstone Rangers, see Natalie Y. Moore and Lance Williams, *The Almighty Black P Stone Nation: The Rise, Fall, and Resurgence of an American Gang* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2011).

35. Keorapetse Kgositsile, untitled essay in Brooks et al., *A Capsule Course*, 12.

36. Kgositsile, in *A Capsule Course*, 13.

37. C. L. R. James and Grace C. Lee (Boggs) with the collaboration of Cornelius Castoriadis, *Facing Reality* (1958; Detroit: Bewick Editions, 1974), 131.

38. Joy James, "Introduction: Democracy and Captivity," in *The New Abolitionists: (Neo)Slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings*, ed. Joy James (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), xxxii.

39. Jack Newfield, "An Anniversary for Attica," *New York Times*, September 13, 1972, 47.

40. "War at Attica: Was There No Other Way?," *Time*, September 27, 1971, 18.

41. David Caplan, *Questions of Possibility: Contemporary Poetry and Poetic Form* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 11–12:

> [Claude McKay's poem] even made *Time* magazine after a reporter discovered it in the Attica State prison following the September 1971 uprising, the largest penal rebellion in American history. Reading the sonnet as a call to action, the prisoners circulated it to each other, along with banned books by Malcolm X and Bobby Seale. *Time* reproduced the first quatrain, meticulously copied in a prisoner's neat script. Showing far less care, the magazine identified the words as "written by an unknown prisoner, crude but touching in its would-be heroic style." Two issues later, a concerned reader, "Gwendolyn Brooks of Chicago," corrected the error, rebuking *Time*'s "poetry specialist," who failed to recognize "one of the most famous poems ever written." Pointedly, Brooks concluded her letter by quoting the poem in full.

42. Mshaka's poem would later be republished in *Prison Writing in 20th-Century America*, ed. H. Bruce Franklin (London: Penguin, 1998), 178–79.

43. Thompson, *Blood in the Water*, 213.

44. LeRoi Jones (Imamu Amiri Baraka), *Black Music* (1968; New York: Da Capo, 1998), 196.

45. Shepp's concert is mentioned in Anthony Bannon, "Seeking a Revolution of Mind in Attica," *Buffalo Evening News*, September 16, 1972, B-9. The concert is also discussed in Peter Doggett, *There's a Riot Going On: Revolutionaries, Rock Stars, and the Rise and Fall of the 60s* (New York: Grove Press, 2009), 99. According to Doggett, "The Panthers' newspaper ignored the efforts of jazzman Archie Shepp to keep the plight of the widows and families of the Attica State casualties in the spotlight. . . . Shepp's finely crafted *Attica Blues* album received little notice, even after he played a concert at the institution on 4 July 1972."

46. For an important study of Black poets' textual experimentation during this period, see Aldon Lynn Nielsen, *Black Chant: Languages of African-American Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

47. As mentioned earlier, Tisdale assigned Randall's *The Black Poets* as a textbook for his class. Baraka's "Black Art" is included in Randall's anthology, so Norris would certainly have had easy access to the poem.

48. William J. Harris, *The Poetry and Poetics of Amiri Baraka: The Jazz Aesthetic* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985), 75.

49. Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (New York: Freundlich, 1984), 187.

50. One exception is Lee Bernstein, *America Is the Prison: Arts and Politics in Prison in the 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). For a recent critical study of Baraka, see James Smethurst, *Brick City Vanguard: Amiri Baraka, Black Music, Black Modernity* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2020).

51. Norfolk Prison Brothers, ed., *Who Took the Weight? Black Voices from Norfolk Prison* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972).

52. Elma Lewis, foreword to Norfolk Prison Brothers, *Who Took the Weight?*, xii.

53. Lewis, foreword, xv.

54. For other community-based poetry workshops in Black communities during this time, see, for example, Sonia Sanchez, ed., *Three Hundred and Sixty Degrees of Blackness Comin at You: An Anthology of the Sonia Sanchez Writers Workshop at Countee Cullen Library in Harlem* (New York: 5x Publishing, 1971).

55. Juno Bakali Tshombe / Craig Dee Anderson, "Attempt—or The Reason Why the Revolution / Is Getting Off to a Bad Start," in Norfolk Prison Brothers, *Who Took the Weight?*, 7. Cosmic or astral jazz albums released in 1972—the year Tisdale began his Attica workshop and *Who Took the Weight?* was published—include Pharoah Sanders's *Black Unity*, Alice Coltrane's *World Galaxy*, and Sun Ra's *The Night of the Purple Moon*, among many others.

56. Juno Bakali Tshombe / Craig Dee Anderson, "Psychological Warfare at Norfolk Prison Camp," in Norfolk Prison Brothers, *Who Took the Weight?*, 95.

57. Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon, 2002), 6.

58. James, "Introduction," xxxii.

59. Readers might also look to Attica prisoner A. Jabar's poem "This iS A recording" in *The Last Stop: Writing from Comstock Prison*, ed. Joseph Bruchac (Greenfield Center, NY: Greenfield Review Press, 1974), 17–21.

60. For a history of the uprising and the post-uprising brutality told in graphic novel form, see Frank "Big Black" Smith, *Big Black: Stand at Attica* (Los Angeles: Archaia, 2020).

61. James, "Introduction," xxxii.

62. Harold E. Packwood, letter to Celes Tisdale, October 13, 1972, in Celes Tisdale's personal archive.