

Creating a Movement with Teeth: A Documentary History of the George Jackson Brigade. Edited by Daniel Burton-Rose. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010. 315 pp. ISBN: 978-1-60486-223-2. \$24.95.

Creating a Movement with Teeth: A Documentary History of the George Jackson Brigade, edited by Daniel Burton-Rose, contains a selection of documents by and about the George Jackson Brigade, the Seattle-based revolutionary group that was active in the 1970s. The brigade's members believed that without the use of arms, there would be no revolution. "The main point of unity for the Brigade has always been the determination to fight capitalism—with force of arms—here and now" (148). Although the brigade believed that the central task of revolutionaries was mass organizing, they also believed in developing the theory and practice of armed struggle (149). While an ideological division existed within the brigade between its Marxist-Leninist members and those who advocated anarchism, they all agreed on the desired outcome of their actions. They sought a "classless, stateless society," as they worked toward the overthrow of the U.S. government and capitalism (169).

With only seven members, the George Jackson Brigade was exceptional for its diversity. Five members were "queer or bisexual," four were ex-convicts, three were women, and one was black (21). Their inspiration was George Jackson, a member of the Black Panther Party who was killed on August 21, 1971, during an attempt to escape from the prison in San Quentin. Jackson was clear on the need for arms: "The government of the U.S.A. and all that it stands for, all that it represents, must be destroyed. This is the starting point, and the end. We have the means to this end; the problem is to develop acceptance of their use" (11).

The George Jackson Brigade first struck on May 31, 1975, bombing the Division of Corrections in the Capitol Complex Building in Olympia, Washington. Its final action was a robbery of a Tacoma branch of the Puget Sound National Bank on February 28, 1978. In between, the brigade bombed two banks; offices of the FBI and the Bureau of Indian Affairs; a Safeway supermarket and a Safeway warehouse and distribution center; and a Puget Sound Power and Light substation serving a wealthy community. It robbed state liquor stores and more

than ten banks in Washington and Oregon.¹ The brigade's last members—Janine Bertram, Therese Coupez, and John Sherman—were arrested by federal agents on March 21, 1978, the day they planned to rob a Tacoma branch of the United Mutual Savings Bank. They have all since been released from prison.

The selected documents, which include communiqués, newspaper articles, interviews, and a political statement, cover the period of the brigade's activity from 1975 to 1977. *Creating a Movement with Teeth* is intended as a companion volume to Burton-Rose's *Guerrilla USA: The George Jackson Brigade and the Anticapitalist Underground of the 1970s* (2010). In his short introduction, Burton-Rose sets forth his purpose in preparing the volume:

It provides the original documents upon which [*Guerrilla USA*] is in part based so that interested readers may access the writings of the Brigade and their interlocutors relatively unmediated. My goal in collecting these documents is not apologia: reproducing the communiqués implies no more an endorsement of their contents than reprinting the accompanying poems implies aesthetic appreciation. . . . Rather, I am attempting to supplement an anemic record of the radical social movements of the 1970s, and to preserve and pass down a collective engagement with the ever-vexing problem of community self-defense and revolution in the United States. (23–24)

Indeed, it is as a companion volume to *Guerrilla USA* that this collection is most useful, since the introductory material, headnotes, and endnotes provide only limited guidance in locating the documentary material within the history of the brigade, and within the broader context of movements for social change in the 1970s.

While Burton-Rose neither condemns nor outright approves the use of violence in pursuit of revolution, Ward Churchill, writing the book's preface, is more forthcoming. Churchill asserts that only through the work of Burton-Rose and others "can the real history of what was unquestionably the most coruscating revolutionary moment in recent American history be revealed, its meaning(s) honestly/accurately evaluated, its theoretical/tactical defects identified and corrected, its utility recalibrated for more effective present/future application(s)" (15). The reader may reasonably conclude that Burton-

Rose is sympathetic to this view. His support of violence is barely tempered with statements such as: "If one is to have bombers active in one's own city, it seems desirable that they at least be ambivalent and self-denigrating, as Brigade members were" (23).

In the short section on editorial conventions following the introduction, the editor states that documents are reproduced essentially as they were, although insignificant errors have been silently emended and punctuation has been standardized. Information has been provided on individuals and organizations that may not be immediately familiar to readers. (However, Burton-Rose assumes a good deal of knowledge on the part of his readers.) More explanation of the editorial principles that the editor followed would have been useful. For example, all the documents are titled, but it is not clear whether the titles are from the original documents or whether they have been added by the editor.

The volume is arranged into four parts. Part 1 contains profiles of the brigade's members and is itself divided into three sections: reports of law enforcement; press coverage in the mainstream media; and articles in the countercultural press. Part 2 contains the brigade's communiqués—its statements explaining the group's actions and goals. It is not clear what criteria the editor used in selecting the communiqués. Although it seems likely that Burton-Rose included all the communiqués issued by the brigade, clarification of this point would have been helpful. The communiqués are from "former Brigade members' personal papers and a file kept by the now-defunct Toronto-based political prisoner support collective Arm the Spirit" (25). Many of the communiqués are in the FBI's file on the brigade, and they are all contained in the files of the Seattle Police Department's Intelligence Division. Most of the communiqués have headnotes indicating date and place of publication (usually in the countercultural press). A few documents are preceded by extensive explanatory material, which allows the reader a fuller appreciation of a document's significance. "The Power of the People Is the Source of Life," the political statement of the George Jackson Brigade, comprises Part 3. Also included in this part are the brigade's chronology of its actions and an open letter to the brigade from the Valerian Coven, which was "an anonymous collection of politically active workers and students in the Seattle area."²

Part 4 is comprised of interviews, open letters, critiques of the brigade, and other pieces that were published in *Northwest Passage*, a countercultural periodical

based in Bellingham and Seattle from the late 1960s into the 1980s. Burton-Rose's preference for the countercultural press over the mainstream press reflects his political bent. Other than profiles of brigade members included in Part 1, Burton-Rose ignores the mainstream press—in his words, the "corporate media." He includes no articles describing the injuries to persons and property that were caused by the brigade's actions. The reader has no sense of the effect of the brigade's bombings and armed robberies on the general population.

The last part of *Creating a Movement with Teeth* is titled "Processing" and is an interview by Burton-Rose with former brigade members Bo Brown, Mark Cook, and Ed Mead, which took place in October 2005. When asked to give their perspectives on the brigade's impact, the responses of the former members show that none of them have any illusions about what they accomplished. "It politicized a lot of people," said Cook. Brown stated that they brought "the prison struggle closer to the forefront of regular people's minds" (264–65).

Rather than separating the documents into these five parts, a chronological arrangement would have made the brigade's history more accessible. For example, an interview with Ed Mead from May 1976, in Part 4, refers to a communiqué issued on International Women's Day in March 1976, which is in Part 2. The brigade's political statement, issued on November 3, 1977, follows a communiqué issued on Easter Sunday 1978. The placing of the notes at the end of the book, rather than following each document, contributes to the sense of disjointedness.

As noted above, *Creating a Movement with Teeth* is best considered together with *Guerrilla USA*, which gives a thorough history of the George Jackson Brigade. Together, these volumes achieve Burton-Rose's goal of supplementing the record of the radical social movements of the 1970s. This is a good thing. Whether or not the editor also has achieved his thinly veiled goal of making readers more sympathetic to the brigade, and to the use of arms in bringing about a more just society, remains an open question.

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Notes

1. Daniel Burton-Rose, *Guerrilla USA: The George Jackson Brigade and the Anticapitalist Underground of the 1970s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), xvi–xvii.
2. Burton-Rose, *Guerrilla USA*, 70.