

Review: Bad

Bad: The Autobiography of James Carr. Pelagian Press. £5.95.

Anarchist Communist Federation

1995

This is not a book for the weak stomachs, being the story of one Black man's struggle against his, and others, brutalization at the hands of the state and, in particular, the U.S. prison system. It pulls no punches and makes no excuses, Carr was not an archetypical 'political' prisoner and people looking for a black and white tale of Good Vs. Evil will find parts of this book somewhat...unsettling.

The important thing about this book, however, is Carr's evolution, accelerated by his reading of Korsch, Lukacs and the Situationists, from someone with a criminal mentality to someone with a revolutionary mentality. This revolutionary perspective isn't outlined until the Conclusion of the book but is all the more powerful and inspiring for it.

Upon finally getting out of prison Carr, who had been a central figure in George Jackson's famous 'Wolf Pack', joined the Black Panther Party, working as personal bodyguard to the Supreme Commander Huey P. Newton. Carr rapidly concluded that the armed reformism of the (by 1970) seriously Stalinized Panthers could only lead to defeat and his criticism of the militaristic politics then dominant is spot on. Carr's break with 'leftist' politics was cut short by his murder in 1972, shortly after finishing this book. The motive behind his assassination has never been definitively ascertained. A COINTELPRO (F.B.I.) hit? A product of the fratricidal conflicts within the Black liberation movement?

With interesting and highly informative Introduction, Afterword and, particularly, New Afterword (with really useful footnotes!) this updated reprint is gripping, depressing and inspirational in turn. Definitely worth a read.

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