

Chapter Twelve

Mumia Abu-Jamal

Mumia Abu-Jamal (Wesley Cook) and his twin brother, Wayne, were born in Philadelphia on April 24, 1954. While in junior high Abu-Jamal joined a march of schoolchildren protesting for black studies classes. While a high school student, he and three friends protested a rally for Southern segregationist George Wallace's presidential campaign. When they were subsequently attacked by whites on the subway, Abu-Jamal appealed to a passing police officer for help. Instead of assistance, he was kicked and punched by the officer, injured past recognition, arrested, and charged with assault. In his book *All Things Censored*, Abu-Jamal writes that he has been "thankful to that faceless cop ever since, for he kicked me straight into the Black Panther Party."¹

A founding member of the Philadelphia chapter of the Black Panther Party, Abu-Jamal soon found his passion in writing for their paper. He became the lieutenant of information for the Philadelphia Panthers when only fifteen. Like all Panthers working in Philadelphia, he was targeted and monitored by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) domestic counterinsurgency program, COINTELPRO. Abu-Jamal remained a Panther until 1970, when factionalism and FBI deception crippled the party.

Attending Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont, for several semesters between 1978 and 1980, he expanded his journalistic skills by working at the campus radio station. When he returned to Philadelphia, he did reporting on three stations. His career path, however, was continually blocked because of his political views.

One particularly contentious issue in his broadcasts was his coverage of MOVE, a revolutionary community based in Philadelphia. On August 8, 1978, officials flooded, tear-gassed, and shot into the MOVE compound. A police officer was killed, and a MOVE baby also died, allegedly murdered, although mainstream press denied the latter.² Nine MOVE members were convicted for the officer's death and were sentenced to thirty to one hundred years of imprisonment.³ Abu-Jamal's anger about the siege, deaths, and incarceration of MOVE members highlighted his commentaries. Because of his support for the MOVE organization and his criticisms of

the Philadelphia police and city administration, he was fired by a local radio station and Mayor Frank Rizzo,⁴ a former police officer, threatened him at a press conference.⁵

Although he was still an influential journalist, the loss of his position made supporting his family, which included three children, difficult; consequently, he began driving a cab to supplement his income. After being robbed twice at gunpoint, Abu-Jamal legally bought a gun. While working as a cabbie on December 9, 1981, Abu-Jamal saw his brother, William Cook, being assaulted by a police officer. Abu-Jamal was shot while intervening, and a police officer, Daniel Faulkner, was killed. Abu-Jamal was charged with and convicted of Faulkner's death and sentenced to death following a trial presided over by pro-prosecutorial judge Albert F. Sabo.⁶

Abu-Jamal's past political activity with the Black Panther Party figured prominently in the prosecution's case for the death penalty and its strategy to portray him as a violent "cop-killer." In addition, his forcibly assigned attorney was unprepared and neglected to refute basic inconsistencies in the prosecution's case.⁷ Consequently, Abu-Jamal chose to represent himself. Consistently maintaining his innocence, he has spent his sentence appealing his imprisonment and continuing his journalistic advocacy for social justice.

While incarcerated, Abu-Jamal obtained a B.A. from Goddard College, an honorary doctorate of law from the New College of California, a Blackstone School of Law paralegal degree, and completed a thesis for an M.A. in humanities history at California State University. He has published three books: *Live from Death Row*, *Death Blossoms*, and *All Things Censored*.⁸ His death sentence was overturned in December of 2001 after a judge found that the instructions to the jury during his trial were unconstitutional.⁹ Mumia Abu-Jamal remains on death row awaiting the outcome of appeals.

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NOTES

- Research and draft for this biography were provided by Tiffany Bradley.
1. Mumia Abu-Jamal, *All Things Censored* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2000), 104.
 2. Gregory Jaynes, "Officer Killed as Philadelphia Radicals Are Evicted," *New York Times*, 9 August 1978, NJ21-NJ22.
 3. Charles Sims Africa, Debbie Sims Africa, Delbert Orr Africa, Edward Goodman Africa, Janet Holloway Africa, Janine Phillips Africa, Michael Davis Africa, and William Phillips Africa are all still incarcerated. Merle Austin Africa died in prison in 1998. For more information on the MOVE prisoners, see *Can't Jail the Spirit: Political Prisoners in the U.S.*, 5th ed. (Chicago: Committee to End the Marion Lockdown, 2002).
 4. See: Joseph R. Daughen and Peter Binzen, *The Cop Who Would Be King: Mayor Frank Rizzo* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977).
 5. Terry Bisson, *On a Move: The Story of Mumia Abu-Jamal* (Farmington, Pa.: Litmus Books, 2000), 166.
 6. *All Things Censored*, 272.
 7. See his former attorney's article: Daniel R. Williams, "The Ordeal of Mumia Abu-Jamal," in *States of Confinement*, ed. Joy James. New York: St. Martin's, 2000.
 8. Mumia Abu-Jamal, *Live from Death Row* (New York: Avon, 1996); *Death Blossoms: Reflections from a Prisoner of Conscience* (Farmington, Pa.: Plough Publishing House, 1997); *All Things Censored*.
 9. Sara Rimer, "Death Sentence Overturned in 1981 Killing of Officer," *New York Times*, 19 December 2001.

Intellectuals and the Gallows

Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look; He thinks too much: such men are dangerous.

—Caesar, to Antony; Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act 1, Scene ii

For academicians and intellectuals, the issue of capital punishment, as practiced in the United States, is a troubling challenge. This is especially so in the case of radical intellectuals, who by necessity form a lesser percentage of academicians, and as such may possess a lesser degree of institutional influence in the academy. The struggle such as one wages for respectability for his views, in a milieu that is, by its very nature, conservative and bound by tradition, may sap the needed energy to battle for larger extra-institutional causes, especially one as popularly projected as capital punishment.

The radical intellectual, struggling for her own place in an academy already under siege by market forces and political interference, may lack the stomach for engaging in external conflicts that are deemed "controversial" by the media projectors of the status quo, for even radical intellectuals must eat; and to eat means to affiliate with aggregates of intellectual organization and power (universities), if one wants to teach.

Nothing written in this essay will relieve the tension between one's fear and one's conscience, for nothing is more controversial in the American context than the state's role in determining whether its purported citizens should live or die. Such an inquiry involves an examination of American history, law, state power and race. It also implicitly involves one's stance vis-à-vis the state, and perhaps more unnervingly, public opinion. This very possibility causes some to shudder, and breeds silence in others.

The question then becomes, how can the truly radical intellectual work in such a milieu? How can s/he do both intellectual work and meaningful political work?

THE THREE PUBLICS

The answer is simply that they *must* do so, in spite of so-called public opinion, and indeed, because of it; for public opinion is, in truth, rarely the opinion of the public; it is more often the projection of powerful elites and monied interests. In his "Three Publics Theory," W. Russell Neumann argues that rather than see the public as a largely undifferentiated mass, it is more accurate to see three publics, each of varying sophistications, knowledge and involvement in the issues of the day.

The first public, representing about 20% of the whole, rises from an absolute low level of sophistication to about a third of the total population's and is deemed "unabashedly apolitical." The second public, about 75% of the populace, is margin-

ally attentive to the political world, and does little more than vote. Their level of sophistication and involvement is middling, rising from the third to perhaps 55% at the periphery of this sector. The third public is the activist core, which comprises about 5% of the total.

This sophistication distribution provides some insight into results of opinion polls, and teaches caution in interpreting them. Neumann likens this sophistication breakdown to a kind of "political literacy":

The apoliticals can be thought of as fundamentally illiterate, so they are naturally immune to repeated attempts to politicize and mobilize them. They lie below a critical threshold which puts them outside the flow of meaningful political communications. The middle mass can then be characterized as having modest literacy. They keep track of the most important issues with modest effort, but they lack the background information and rich vocabulary necessary for the quick and convenient processing of large amounts of political information. They can communicate political ideas, but they are hunt-and-peck typists. In contrast, the activists are avid readers and lucid speakers. Since virtually all of the professional politicians, journalists and political analysts fall into the highest stratum, they may well share an ingrained incapacity to understand that the vocabulary of politics is interpreted in somewhat different ways by the middle mass, and in stumbling across this phenomenon from time to time, they may mistake the middle mass for the apolitical stratum at the bottom of the continuum.¹

Included in that "highest stratum," of course, are intellectuals, but rarely are these radicals (for, more often than not, they are stigmatized).

THE CASE OF ANGELA DAVIS

This is illustrated when one considers the notion of left-leaning public intellectuals. The names Angela Davis, Noam Chomsky, Maulana Karenga, and Cornel West leap to mind. Although these scholars represent a wide disparity of perspectives, all may lay some claim to a somewhat radical orientation. Davis is somewhat of an anomaly in this regard as her renown arises not from her remarkable academic or intellectual attributes, but from her historical intersection, interaction, support and proximity with the Black Panther Party, a black revolutionary organization that was involved in several violent conflicts with the state. As a Marxist scholar who stood in support of such a black liberation group, she was herself hounded, imprisoned, and vigorously prosecuted as a black political prisoner on murder, kidnapping and conspiracy charges, stemming from an unsuccessful breakout attempt of several black revolutionaries from the Marin County, California courthouse on 7 August 1970.² It is for this episode, then, that Professor Davis is known, and her large and impressive body of writings is relatively little known. She is rarely quoted in mainstream media, and her deeply informed point of view is rarely heard in the predominantly white-bread, bourgeois realm of punditry. Indeed, one scholar notes her

"iconographic status,"³ as if frozen in the black power era of the early 1970s, while almost three decades of scholarly and popular writings remain virtually ignored. Even given the remoteness of her arrest and acquittal, school administrators have tried to demonize and challenge Davis' work and scholarship. In 1994, conservative state officials opposed her appointment to a University of California Presidential Chair, and in 1996, one Negro regent⁴ castigated the University of California Professor of History of Consciousness for several of her speeches in support of affirmative action, writing: "Your record as a revolutionary is not merely disturbing but it may impair your effectiveness as a member of the faculty of one of this nation's most highly respected academic institutions."⁵

That such a craven political appointee would write such a thing to a distinguished scholar such as Davis, after over a quarter of a century of demonstrating her "effectiveness," is illustrative of the perils facing radical intellectuals.

It illustrates the institutional distaste with which radical intellectuals are held and the lingering threat posed by state actors who oppose radical pedagogy. In a profession where scholars are expected to "publish or perish," Professor Davis has published five books and over twenty-five scholarly articles. The threat arises, then, not because of her lack of scholarship, but because of her political stance.

THE CASE OF NOAM CHOMSKY

The case of linguist Noam Chomsky presents a far more common reflection of the way a radical intellectual is regarded in the United States. Although known in radical, academic and anti-war circles, he is virtually unknown by mainstream media consumers. Although regarded as a brilliant intellectual in the fields of linguistics, cognitive psychology, politics, and philosophy, his anti-imperialistic stance on issues of war and U.S. military aggression has led to his virtual silencing by the media. As early as 1972, Chomsky was named on the Nixon White House "Enemy List" (along with Daniel Ellsberg) for his anti-war intellectual work.⁶ Although he is a prodigious writer (of some 70 books or so) who has been published by activist presses (like South End), Chomsky's work has been suppressed by publishers, and some notable media outlets have refused to print his letters or to do interviews with the scholar.⁷

Frequent coauthor Edward Herman notes:

Chomsky has never had an Op Ed column in *The Washington Post*, and his lone opinion piece in *The New York Times* was not an original contribution but rather excerpts from testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. *The New York Review of Books* exception closed down in 1973, not as a result of any change in Chomsky but following a sharp move to the right by the editors of the journal, who thereafter excluded a number of left critics.⁸

Herman collaborated with Chomsky on a number of works, among them *Counter-Revolutionary Violence: Bloodbaths in Fact and Propaganda* (1973) which was published by a subsidiary of Warner Communications.⁹ Robert Barsky's work on Chomsky's intellectual life and development details the treatment of a text that sought to describe the horrendous violence perpetrated against the Vietnamese people by the United States:

Counter-Revolutionary Violence was suppressed by Warner Communications, the giant parent company of the publisher Warner Modular. This, in itself, sounds implausible: an American megacorporation decides to destroy a book it has already published. Furthermore, because Warner Modular refused to stop distributing the book after Warner Communications issued the order to kill it, the parent company actually put the publisher out of business. It gets worse. The book appeared in French translation (*Bains de sang*) the following year (1974), but, Chomsky insists, it was "mistranslated to satisfy the ideological needs of the French left at that time. . . ."¹⁰

We need not discuss Messrs. Karenga and West at this juncture, for as we have seen, the state and the corporate media utilize various strategies to threaten or minimize the status of scholars who dare question the status quo. Radical scholars who opt to oppose the elite should be mindful of our cited examples, as one contemplates assuming such a stance.

RESPONDING TO REPRESSION WITH ORGANIZATION

It is necessary for us to recognize similar coping strategies employed by Davis and Chomsky to somewhat mitigate their silencing by the corporate media. Both scholars either developed or affiliated with external social-political structures with which they organized challenges to the status quo. For Davis, the Communist Party-USA fulfilled that role, as later did the Committees of Correspondence. Before joining a wing of the CPUSA, Davis swam in the ambiguity between being a full member and a "fellow traveler" of the earliest formation of the Black Panther Political Party of Los Angeles, California, an affiliate of the Oakland office.¹¹

Similarly (if not to the same degree) Chomsky has either been on the periphery or in collectives with other activists. Although not a member, Chomsky was "fairly close to" the Zionist-Socialist youth group Hashomer Hatzair, although he found their Marxist-Leninist ideology a bit hard to take.¹² He has chosen to participate in the South End Press and *Z Magazine* collectives, both of which have published the bulk of his books and articles. Both had their birth in the Rosa Luxemburg student group at MIT, where Chomsky served as a student advisor.¹³

Messrs. Karenga and West are active in external groups. Karenga formed the US organization, and advanced an African-oriented philosophy termed Kawaia. West is active in the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute at Harvard, and holds a leading position

in the Democratic Socialists of America [West resigned from Harvard in 2002 to take a position at Princeton]. Speaking of W. E. B. Du Bois, we are reminded of one of the most brilliant radical intellectuals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and a man who remained so highly regarded precisely because he committed class betrayal, and used his scholarship to demystify and expose the evils of American white supremacy.

But, it is equally important for us to recognize the achievements of organic intellectuals, uneducated radical activists, who used their inherent wisdom to touch people, to organize them, and to move them; folks like Marcus Garvey, Noble Drew Ali, Hon. Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm (X) Shabazz, Huey P. Newton, Eldridge Cleaver, John Africa, and the list goes on. These radicals and revolutionaries knew that to move an inherently conservative, post-agricultural, oppressed people took enormous effort, untold heartbreak, and a genius unlearned in the master's house; yet they did it. There is a lesson in these examples, for radical intellectuals; that they can, indeed must, to quote a Maoism, "learn from the people."

THE RADICAL ANTI-DEATH PROPOSAL

What we have learned is that radical scholars must organize externally to practice their politics and beliefs, for the academic milieu will not suffice. This principle holds true for those radical intellectuals who feel compelled to intervene in the troubling challenge posed by the American practice of death. There are a number of organizations that have either prison or death row as their focus, and would be enriched by the insights and energies of radical thinkers. Radical historians may present linkages between the peculiar American practice of lynchings and the contemporary practice of capital punishment. Radical sociologists might attempt longitudinal studies of those held on death row, or an examination of their families. Radical psychologists might examine how people handle such extended periods of pronounced isolation. Radical philosophers might examine the political usages and advantages of the death penalty to politicians seeking higher office. Radical lawyers and legal scholars might examine the treatment of legal principles by jurists who are called to try, resolve, and develop precedents in capital case jurisprudence.

As Chomsky and Herman noted in *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*,¹⁴ the mainstream media serves the ruling class interests by derogation, illusion, obfuscation and lies. In the case of radical intellectual antagonists the weapon of choice is to "disappear" them. By so doing they hope to minimize, frustrate and destroy any meaningful critique of the established order.

But there is a method to their madness. The muffling of such critiques has a larger objective: the stifling of the growth and development of popular movements that challenge the status quo, and the rulers. Intellectuals, as a rule, serve the interests of power and capital. Yet it needn't be this way.

With work, with heart, and with daring, they can begin to serve popular interests,

and indeed, radical ones. America's fatal addiction to death can be broken, and the role of radical intellectuals can be pivotal to that success. As we have seen, however, no critique is free from reprisal.

You may be targeted. You may be vilified. You may be threatened. You may even be "disappeared."

Yet this world, and life itself, is broader than the ivory towers of academia. Make external connections. Build bridges to the larger, nonacademic community. Establish social, political and communal networks. The word radical means "from the roots"—so, build roots! Touch base with real folks, and work for the only real source of liberty—life!

Ona Move!

Long Live John Africa!

NOTES

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1. W. Russell Neumann, "The Paradox of Mass Politics: Knowledge and Opinion in the American Electorate," in *Political Psychology: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Neil J. Kessel (New York: Paragon House, 1993), 258.

2. Davis was acquitted of all charges on June 4, 1972.

3. Joy James, ed. *The Angela Y. Davis Reader* (Walden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1998), 19.

4. Editor's note: Abu-Jamal refers here to anti-affirmative action activist Ward Connerly.

5. *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*, 22 n.19.

6. *New York Times*, June 27, 1972.

7. Robert F. Barsky, *Noam Chomsky: A Life of Dissent* (Cambridge: MIT, 1997), 31.

8. Robert F. Barsky, *Noam Chomsky*, 162; Edward S. Herman, "Pol Pot, Faurisson and the Process of Derogation," in *Noam Chomsky: Critical Assessments*, ed. Carlos P. Otero (New York: Routledge, 1994), 3:599.

9. Editor's note: Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *Counter-Revolutionary Violence: Bloodbaths in Fact and Propaganda* (Andover, Mass.: Warner Modular, 1973).

10. Robert F. Barsky, *Noam Chomsky*, 160.

11. Joy James, *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*, 8–10.

12. Robert F. Barsky, *Noam Chomsky*, 76.

13. Rosa Luxemburg (1870–1919) was a socialist theorist and agitator in Germany.

14. Editor's note: Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, 1988; reissued 2002).

Part Two

INTERNATIONALISTS AND ANTI-IMPERIALISTS

Chapter Thirteen

Mutulu Shakur

Mutulu Shakur (Jeral Wayne Williams) was born on August 8, 1950, in Baltimore, Maryland, and grew up in Queens, New York. Shakur's first involvement with political struggle began with New York's Ocean Hill-Brownsville for decentralization and parental-community control of the public school. The movement's relative success led to further civil rights activism.

In 1970, Shakur began his career as an acupuncturist and health care worker. Joining the Lincoln Hospital Detoxification Program in the Bronx, he used acupuncture in the detoxification programs of thousands of drug-addicted patients. In 1978, he earned a Doctor of Acupuncture degree from the Quebec Institute of Acupuncture, and also that year he cofounded the Black Acupuncture Advisory Association of North America (BAAANA) and the Harlem Institute of Acupuncture. Between 1978 and 1982, extending his medical work, he treated not only drug addicts but elderly and poor patients unable to receive affordable, quality health care.¹

Ten years earlier, at the age of eighteen, he had been a "founding citizen" of the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika (RNA), which called for reparations as well as an independent black nation within the South. While serving as a leader and providing security in the RNA, Shakur also worked with the New York chapter of the Black Panther Party (BPP). Following the split in the party, he became a member of the Black Liberation Army (BLA);² yet throughout the 1970s, Shakur largely focused on his work as an RNA leader. Because of his political activities, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) began filing regular surveillance reports on Shakur when he was nineteen.³ In the 1970s, he founded and directed the National Task Force for COINTELPRO Litigation and Research to increase public awareness of the FBI counterintelligence program at a time when few were informed of its existence.

On November 2, 1979, armed BLA members conducted what was described by prison authorities as a "well planned and arranged" action at the Clinton Correctional Institution for Women in New Jersey that resulted in the escape of Assata

Shakur, the prominent BLA leader imprisoned for her alleged role in a 1973 shoot-out on the New Jersey Turnpike. Mutulu Shakur was implicated in the escape by police and subsequently increasingly targeted by them.

On October 20, 1981, an attempted holdup of a Brink's armored truck resulted in the deaths of Brink's guard Peter Paige, police officer Waverly Brown, and Sergeant Ed O'Grady. Although Shakur was not immediately charged and arrested, the Brinks robbery led to a series of legal battles that resulted in his trial and conviction in federal court under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) for conspiracy and participation in "racketeering enterprise, bank robbery, armed bank robbery, and bank robbery murder."⁴ Shakur's defense team argued for an international tribunal to judge him, arguing that Shakur's actions were political and not criminal: the 1977 United Nations amendments to the 1949 Geneva Convention on Human Rights include the clandestine resistance of national liberation movements.

Since his incarceration in 1986, Mutulu Shakur has helped found a youth prisoner organization, the Islamic Young Men's Movement, and played a central role in negotiating a truce between the Bloods and the Crips at Lompoc Penitentiary. A member of the National Committee to Free Political Prisoners prior to his own incarceration, he has supported movements to free political prisoners such as Herman Ferguson, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Sundiata Acoli, and other incarcerated RNA, BLA, and New Afrikan activists.

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NOTES

Research and draft for this biography were provided by Will Tucker and Tiffany Bradley. Although we were unable to provide biographies of Mutulu Shakur's coauthors, we were able to obtain the following information. Mark Cook, the only African American man arrested for the actions of the George Jackson Brigade (of which Bo Brown was a member), served the longest prison term of convicted Brigade members. *Independentista* Adolfo Matos received clemency from President Bill Clinton; he currently lives in Puerto Rico.

1. Mutulu Shakur, "New Afrikan Political Prisoner," in *Can't Jail the Spirit: Political Prisoners in the U.S.*, 4th ed. (Chicago: Committee to End Marion Lockdown, 1998), 148.
2. For details on the Newton/Cleaver-East/West split of the BPP, see Donald Cox, "The Split in the Party," in *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party*, ed. George Katsiaficas and Kathleen Neal Cleaver, 119–22 (New York: Routledge, 2001). The BLA is examined in Russell Shoats, "Black Fighting Formations: Their Strengths, Weaknesses, and Potentialities," in *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party*, 128–38.
3. "Dr. Mutulu Shakur," *Jericho*; Shakur, "New Afrikan Political Prisoner," 149–50.
4. "Memorandum Opinion and Order," *Mutulu Shakur and Marilyn Buck v United States of America*. U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, 97-CV-2908, January 13, 1999.

Genocide against the Black Nation in the U.S. Penal System (Abridged)

Mutulu Shakur, Anthony X. Bradshaw, Malik Dinguswa,
Terry Long, Mark Cook, Adolfo Matos,
and James Haskins
1988

We specifically charge that the government of the United States is practicing genocide through behavior modification and counterinsurgency and low intensity warfare techniques in its state and federal prisons.

We submit that behavior modification as practiced in United States prisons incorporates techniques from both counterinsurgency-low intensity warfare, and psychology for political and military objectives. The implementation of this strategy in the United States penal system is the result of research conducted by government scientists and counterinsurgency agents who studied the theories and works of experts in the distinct fields of behavior therapy (synonymous with behavior modification), insurgency, and low intensity warfare.

Every aspect of this behavior modification program violates the human rights of those persons subjected to it, and it is this treatment that is vehemently complained about by political prisoners and POWs [prisoners of war]. This program involves a scientific approach in targeting special prisoners with the aim of achieving political objectives. Each targeted prisoner is observed to determine his or her leadership potential, religious beliefs, aspirations, and, most importantly, to record his or her reaction to the experiments being implemented. The sole purpose of the program is for government agents to learn lessons from how political prisoners suffered and reacted during experiments; then use those findings to formulate a broad plan to be implemented against the people in society at large who are the ultimate targets.

The oppressive conditions and the experiments conducted in the U.S. penal system, as implemented by prison officials, are evidence of a psychological war being waged against political prisoners' who come from a people involved in a struggle of resistance. When the behavior modification program conducted by the government is viewed in the light of the "Geneva Accord" mandates, one can only conclude that the United States Government's actions are criminal and violate international human rights laws. Accordingly, the United States Government's acts should be regarded as war crimes.

Specifically, the U.S. Government is in violation of Article I of the Geneva Convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide, which was approved by the United Nations General Assembly on December 9, 1948, and the U.S. Government is in violation of resolution 260, III, which entered into force on

January 12, 1951.² In this resolution "the contracting parties confirmed that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and punish." According to Article II, genocide is defined as any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group such as: (a) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily harm or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; or (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Having reviewed the list of acts that constitute the crime of genocide, as set forth by the Geneva Convention, we submit that the behavior modification program being carried out in the United States penal system is a scientific form of genocide waged against the Black Nation, and it is a continuance of the nefarious tactics employed by the government over the years to subjugate the Black Nation. On learning of the use of behavior modification techniques to further counterinsurgency-low intensity warfare objectives, especially in light of the government's intended broad application, all caring people should be shocked.

Behavior modification is a complex science composed of information from psychology, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, and even some aspects of biology. By definition "behavior modification" broadly refers to the systematic manipulation of an environment for the purpose of creating a change in individual behavior.

We submit that Black people were in fact the first experimental targets of group behavior modification. Furthermore, current data and statistics on the prison situation support our contention that Black people inside state and federal prisons today remain the prime targets of the government's program. Moreover, we discovered during our research that the psychological warfare being waged in the U.S. penal system was planned as far back as the early 1960s because the government foresaw that Black people, like those in prison, would revolt against oppression. Black people's conduct, like that of many people throughout history, validates the axiom that "oppression breeds resistance."

In 1961, a social scientist, Dr. Edward Schein, presented his ideas on brainwashing at a Washington, D.C., meeting convened by James V. Bennett, then director of the Federal Bureau of Prison Systems; the meeting was attended by numerous social scientists and prison wardens.³ Dr. Schein suggested to the wardens that brainwashing techniques were natural for use in their institutions. In his address on the topic "Man Against Man," he explained that in order to produce marked changes of behavior and/or attitude it is necessary to weaken, undermine or remove the supports of old patterns of behavior and old attitudes: "Because most of these supports are the face-to-face confirmation of present behavior and attitudes, which are provided by those with whom close emotional ties exist." This can be done by either "removing the individual physically and preventing any communication with those whom he cares about, or by proving to him that those whom he respects are

not worthy of it, and indeed should be actively mistrusted." Dr. Schein then provided the group with a list of specific examples such as:

1. Physical removal of prisoners to areas sufficiently isolated to effectively break or seriously weaken close emotional ties.
 2. Segregation of all natural leaders.
 3. Use of cooperative prisoners as leaders.
 4. Prohibition of group activities not in line with brainwashing objectives.
 5. Spying on the prisoners and reporting back private material.
 6. Tricking men into written statements which are then shown to others.
 7. Exploitation of opportunists and informers.
 8. Convincing the prisoners that they can trust no one.
 9. Treating those who are willing to collaborate in far more lenient ways than those who are not.
 10. Punishing those who show uncooperative attitudes.
 11. Systematic withholding of mail.
 12. Preventing contact with anyone non-sympathetic to the method of treatment and regimen of the captive populace.
 13. Building a group among the prisoners convincing them that they have been abandoned by and totally isolated from the social order.
 14. Disorganization of all group standards among the prisoners.
 15. Undermining of all emotional supports.
 16. Preventing prisoners from writing home or to friends in the community regarding the conditions of their confinement.
 17. Making available and permitting access to only those publications and books that contain materials which are neutral to or supportive of the desired new attitudes.
 18. Placing individuals into new and ambiguous situations for which the standards are kept deliberately unclear and then putting pressure on them to conform to what is desired in order to win favor and a reprieve from the pressure.
 19. Placing individuals whose willpower has been severely weakened or eroded into a living situation with several others who are more advanced in their thought reform and whose job it is to further the undermining of the individuals' emotional supports which were begun by isolating them from family and friends.
 20. Using techniques of character invalidation, e.g., humiliations, revilement, shouting to induce feelings of guilt, fear and suggestibility, coupled with sleeplessness, and exacting prison regimen and periodic interrogational interviews.
- ...ing all insincere attempts to comply with cellmates' pressures with hostility.
- ...ing out to prisoner by cellmates of where he was in the past, ... not even living up to his own standards or values.

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23. Rewarding of submission and subservience to the attitudes encompassing the brainwashing objective with a lifting of pressure and acceptance as a human being.
24. Providing social emotional supports which reinforce the new attitudes.

Following Schein's address, Bennett commented, "We can perhaps undertake some of the techniques Dr. Schein discussed and do things on your own. Undertake a little experiment with what you can do with the Muslims. There is a lot of research to do. Do it as groups and let us know the results."

Approximately eleven years after that significant meeting, it was confirmed that Schein's ideas and objectives were in fact being implemented inside the prisons. In July 1972, the Federal Prisoner's Coalition, in a petition to the United Nations Economic and Social Council, asserted that the Asklepieion program conducted at the Marion, Illinois, federal penitentiary was directly modeled on methods of thought control/reform. The petition contains a point-by-point comparison between Schein's address, and the goals and structure of the Asklepieion program.⁴

We should not overlook the fact that prison officials will also use drugs as a method of control. In fact, we have discovered that most of the drugs used by prison officials today are far more detrimental in their relative potency than those used in earlier years.⁵ It is not unusual inside the prisons today to see prisoners exhibiting "zombie-like-behavior" as a result of the type of drugs administered to them against or with their consent. In many prisons it is a prerequisite for some prisoners to take certain prescribed drugs in order to be released from solitary confinement. There are several courts that support the forcible use of drugs by prison officials, thus leaving the way open for the use of drugs as a hands-on tactic.

Whether or not one responds with a shocked conscience on learning of the behavior modification experiments, one should bear in mind that the behavior modification experiments are conducted to achieve warfare objectives. Nevertheless, the judicial branch of government, by not intervening to order the executive branch [Reagan/Bush administrations] to cease their deleterious program and practices, supports the daily abuses arising out of the behavior modification program. . . .

We submit that the captured Black Nation was and remains a prime target of the government's strategy of behavior modification counterinsurgency and low intensity warfare. Evidence of the government's strategy is revealed by the exceptionally harsh treatment inflicted on Black prisoners—especially those prisoners who are committed to the Black Liberation Movement's struggle for self-determination.

It is important to understand that the prisons in the United States have always been operated primarily by white administrators predominantly working with white prison guards. This combination of factors renders the Black prisoner excessively vulnerable to and a prime target of unbridled racism and brutality.

Also, we must not overlook the fact that there are prisoners from other oppressed Nations inside the United States and from the Caribbean Islands who, as they fight for their national liberation, are also targeted by this government. . . . The Puerto

Rican National Liberation Movement in Puerto Rico and in the United States has been a prime target of the U.S. government, and the government has used the most severe tactics of counterinsurgency and low intensity warfare against them for over a half century. Since United States troops invaded the island in 1898, the people have used every method within their reach to terminate the colonial structure designed and imposed on them by their U.S. colonizers. . . . UN General Assembly Resolution 3030 states that "The General Assembly . . . reaffirms the legitimacy of the people's struggle for liberation from colonial and foreign domination and alien subjugation by all available means, including armed struggle." The American Government has assassinated members of the Puerto Rican movement; it has tortured and maimed its political prisoners; it has used frame-ups for imprisonment; it has transferred the Puerto Rican leadership from the Island of Puerto Rico to prisons deep inside the United States, thus, denying the leadership the opportunity to maintain a community with other activists.⁶

Another example of U.S. imperialism appears in the government's handling of incarcerated Black and Latin freedom fighters from the Caribbean. Many of these prisoners are politically opposed to the "puppet regimes in their Caribbean Islands that America controls." Consequently, these dissident prisoners also become targets of the government's counterinsurgency and low intensity warfare. (It should also be understood that because of the geo-political and economic objectives the United States is carrying out in these underdeveloped and developing nations many social crimes are committed on these islands and these crimes are a direct result of America's intervention.) After arriving on U.S. soil, though, the prisoners from the Caribbean Islands become socially, politically and culturally active in the prison system, and their experiences incline them to create unbreakable bonds between themselves and the other Black freedom fighters inside the United States.

To fully appreciate the overall effect of behavior modification and low intensity warfare on those prisoners subjected to it, more research will have to be done. But we feel that it is safe to say, in view of the incarceration of freedom fighters from the Caribbean in this prison system, and their resulting political and cultural isolation, that they are very, very much enmeshed in the U.S. government's counterinsurgency-low intensity warfare and behavior modification programs.

The citing of Blacks from the United States and the Caribbean and Puerto Ricans from the United States and Puerto Rico⁸—all freedom fighters of color—gives rise to the question: Are white anti-imperialists prisoners also targeted by the government's programs? When white anti-imperialists are charged and brought before judicial tribunals, often U.S. judges maintain that because the white anti-imperialists are not victims of oppression, they have no justification for participating in resistance. This position rejects a political stance based on the "necessity defense" of the "Nuremberg Principle" [see Marilyn Buck's essay that follows]. Furthermore, it is natural for caring people to sympathize with and support those who resist being oppressed. However, when the white anti-imperialists do get involved in the resistance and are placed in prison, a racist government can discourage other

whites from aligning themselves with Blacks in struggle by the severe, at times cruel, treatment it inflicts on anti-imperialists.

We charge that there is and has been a very clear and systematic program of low intensity warfare in motion in America's prisons based on "mentacide"—the ruthless manipulation of people's minds that reduces them to broken subjects.

Isolation and sensory deprivation as it is practiced in prisons across America is a definite aspect of the oppressor's controlled environment. Through isolation, and through the systematic removal, inclusion, or manipulation of key sensory stimuli, the government can attack a prisoner's mind and reduce him or her to a warped, subservient state characterized by feelings of lethargy, listlessness and hopelessness . . . in short, a prisoner develops the feeling of being "more dead than alive."

They combine sensory stimuli with a nutritiously deficient diet, that leaves one feeling hungry, lethargic, and depressed (ultimately with self-destructive thoughts). Government officials know exactly what they are doing; they know precisely what their "scientific" experiments will entail. In this they are again in violation of international standards.⁹

The penal system is designed to break minds, to create warped and aberrant personalities, and isolation and sensory deprivation play a singular and unique role in this.¹⁰

In general, all prisoners are targeted. (Even the staff themselves become victimized by the same system they blindly seek to uphold: you cannot dehumanize people without yourself becoming dehumanized in the process.) Yes, all prisoners are targeted, and the harshness of their treatment varies only in degree, with the most severe treatment being meted out to those with some political consciousness. They concentrate punishment on the political prisoner because the political prisoner has the clearest understanding of the prevailing exploitative relationships, and so has the greatest potential for awakening and organizing the rest of the prisoners.

In prison, isolation and sensory deprivation, deficient diets, confinement within a limited space, denial of privacy, lack of natural light and fresh air, lack of comradeship, lack of undisturbed sleep, lack of proper health care, lack of educational and recreational outlets—all reduce one to an existence of lifelessness.

This is war. This is a war of attrition, and it is designed to reduce prisoners to a state of submission essential for their ideological conversion. That failing, the next option in deadly sequence is to reduce the prisoners to a state of psychological incompetence sufficient to neutralize them as efficient, self-directing antagonists. That failing, the only option left is to destroy the prisoners, preferably by making them desperate enough to destroy themselves. The purpose of this isolation and sensory deprivation is to disrupt one's balance, one's inner equilibrium, to dehumanize the prisoner, to depersonalize him, to strip him of his unique individuality, rendering him pliant in the hands of his vicious captors.

We note that amongst the many effects of the process is the disruption of the biological time clock, neuropathic disorders, bio-chemical degeneration, depression, apathy, chronic rage reaction, defensive psychological withdrawal, loss of

appetite (or the opposite extreme), weight loss, and the exacerbation of pre-existing medical problems.

There are important and relevant international bodies that exist to uncover and redress human rights violations.¹¹ But what we ask—those of us who have been victimized—is “Where are the stringent voices of those international bodies as, day in and day out, our rights and dignity, are offended and trampled on over and over again?” Is everyone so inexorably chained to partisan politics that they refrain from applying their conscience until given the nod by party bigwigs? The world can see what goes on in the tombs of America as Black people are being slowly strangled and suffocated to death. . . .

Yes, the world can see what goes on. Yet there remains a deadly chorus of silence, a conspiracy of silence.

We charge the American Government with genocide. In clear, unequivocal terms, we charge the American government with genocide against the captive Black people in America who are perpetually under siege.

NOTES

Originally published in unedited form in *Schooling the Generations in the Politics of Prison*, ed. Chinosole (Berkeley, Calif.: New Earth Publications, 1996).

1. When the term “political prisoner” is used in this paper, it is not limited to those who are incarcerated as a result of their political beliefs, actions, or affiliations. The term includes persons in prison for social crimes who became politicized inside prison walls, and who oriented their lives around the struggle for social justice and national liberation. Such persons as MALCOLM X, GEORGE JACKSON, THE ATTICA WARRIORS, and the many other men and women of yesterday and today’s struggle would be and are encompassed in the term.

2. Essentially, the Nuremberg principle makes war crimes indefensible despite military orders. See Marilyn Buck, “The Struggle for Status Under International Law” [found in this anthology].

Editor’s note: The U.S. Congress ratified the UN Convention against Genocide in 1988, adding crippling amendments; then-president Ronald Reagan signed it into law that same year.

3. Information concerning that historical meeting is found in Alan W. Schefflin, *The Mind Manipulators* (Grosset and Dunlap, 1978); and the pamphlet *Breaking Men’s Minds* on behavior control in Marion, Illinois.

4. See Schefflin, *Mind Manipulators*.

Editor’s note: Asklepieion (from Asklepios, a Greek deified for his healing powers) was the name given to a behavior modification program based on Transactional Analysis (TA) and applied in several maximum-security prisons in the United States beginning in the 1970s.

5. The drug thorazine (chlorpromazine) was one of the first anti-schizophrenia drugs used in the United States and was generally given to prisoners in earlier years. This drug, which produces “zombie-like-behavior” in the individual, has been used as the standard against which the newer drugs are compared. (See Arnold A. Lazarus, *The Practice of Multi-*

modal Therapy [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, paperback reprint edition].) Although thorazine is still being used by prison officials today, new drugs called prolixin (fluphenazine) and haldol (haloperidol) are increasingly prescribed. Prolixin has a relative milligram potency of 70:1 to thorazine, and haldol has a potency of 100:1 to thorazine; both can cause drastic mental and physical side effects.

6. A Senate committee chaired by Senator Frank Church [D-Idaho] in 1975 evaluated the riots and rebellion that swept the United States during the development of the Liberation Movement in the 1960s era, and the government’s use of illegal and deadly means to counter protest movements.

7. Again, the U.S. Government is clearly violating international standards by transferring Puerto Rican and Caribbean political prisoners into U.S. prisons. On March 3, 1989, the U.N. General Assembly passed Resolution 43/173, also called “Body of principles for the protection of all persons under any form of detention or imprisonment.” Principle 20 states, “If a detained or imprisoned person so requests, he shall if possible be kept in a place of detention or imprisonment reasonably near his usual place of residence.”

8. The exploitative and brutal control the United States wields over the Caribbean Islands is evinced by its cowardly attack on Grenada, its intervention in Michael Manley’s government during the Jamaican election, and the continual colonization of the Virgin Islands. One salient consequence of the U.S. exploitation of the Caribbean is the influx of Rastafarian and progressive prisoners from the Islands into U.S. prisons.

9. See *Covert Action Information Bulletin*, issue number 31, wherein Susan Rosenberg speaks about the horrendous conditions under which she, Silvia Baraldini and Alejandrina Torres were confined in the Lexington High Security Unit. UN Resolution 43/173, Principle 22, passed into effect on March 19, 1989, states the following: “No detained or imprisoned person shall, even with his consent, be subjected to any medical or scientific experimentation which may be detrimental to his health.”

10. See Schefflin, *The Mind Manipulators*. It contains information on some of the techniques used on prisoners; its list of the chapters includes “Assaulting the Mind”; “Tampering with the Mind”; “Ruling the Mind”; “Amputating the Mind”; “Pruning the Mind”; “Rewiring the Mind”; “Blowing the Mind”; “Castrating the Mind”; “Robotizing the Mind.”

11. We do not mean to imply that these international bodies have not done some outstanding work. We acknowledge that these bodies have monitored certain regions and countries, and they have called attention to human rights abuses occurring in those areas. What we do charge, however, and feel most strongly about, is that these same international bodies have been virtually silent with regard to the brutal treatment of Blacks in America, a people who have never had any real rights in America. We are calling attention to this neglect. (See Marilyn Buck “The Struggle for Status Under International Law.”)

Chapter Fourteen

Marilyn Buck

Marilyn Buck was born in 1947, in Temple, Texas, the daughter of a nurse and an Episcopal minister active in the civil rights movement. She herself first became politically active while a student at the University of Texas, and later at the University of California-Berkeley, where she protested against sexism and the Vietnam War and supported the Black Power movement. In 1967, Buck attended a teacher-organizer school led by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in Chicago and briefly edited the SDS's national newsletter, *New Left Notes*. Committed to educational organizing, in 1968, she returned to California and began with San Francisco Newsreel, a radical filmmaking collective. Buck also worked in solidarity with indigenous groups and the black liberation movement, the Black Liberation Army (BLA), and international organizations struggling in Vietnam, Palestine, and Iran.

In 1973, Marilyn Buck became a target of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) COINTELPRO campaign against the Black Liberation Army and the Weathermen. Captured in her apartment in San Francisco, she was held on a \$100,000 cash bail for purchasing ammunition under a false ID and for an application for a social security card using an alias.¹ Convicted, Buck was sentenced to ten years, an unusually long term for a minor offense. The FBI accused her of being a member of the BLA and increased surveillance of Buck during her incarceration, monitoring her contacts with friends and political associates who corresponded with and visited her.

Sent to an experimental behavior modification program at the Federal Women's Prison in Alderson, West Virginia, Buck endured psychological torture used in U.S. prisons to "neutralize" prisoners who pose the threat of political dissidence or escape. In 1977, she did not return from a work furlough; she escaped and went underground, where she continued anti-imperialist and antiracist activism.

In 1979, when Black Panther-BLA leader Assata Shakur successfully escaped from a New Jersey prison, Buck was suspected as an accomplice. In October 1981, along with codefendants Mutulu Shakur, Sekou Odinga, Silvia Baraldini, and others, she was indicted in a conspiracy that included Assata Shakur's escape and the

"Brink's robbery" in Rockland County, New York, which resulted in the killing of two policemen and a guard.² Buck was captured in Dobbs Ferry, New York, in 1985.³

For the next five years, Buck faced four separate trials.⁴ In 1987, she went on trial for conspiracy under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO), used in counterinsurgency because it turned politically subversive movements into "criminal" organizations. Baraldini and Odinga were convicted in the first RICO trial.⁵ Buck and Mutulu Shakur were convicted in 1987 in the second RICO conspiracy trial, charged with conspiracy to commit armed bank robbery in support of the New Afrikan Independence struggle.⁶ She was sentenced to fifty years in addition to twenty years of previous convictions and ten years for the resistance conspiracy case (see Evans et al. biography in this volume) for a total of eighty years.⁷

Trained as a literacy teacher, Marilyn Buck has worked in prison with immigrant women and women pursuing their graduate equivalent degrees (GEDs). Laura Whitehorn recalls witnessing Buck—then her prison cellmate—quietly getting up at five o'clock in the morning to tutor women who wanted to learn confidentially and teaching yoga classes and conducting HIV/AIDS education and support work with other prisoners.⁸ Studying for a master's in poetics, she continues to write and publish poetry, and until recently wrote a column, "Notes from the Unrepententary," in *Prison Legal News*. In the 1990s, she translated articles for the Chicago monthly journal *Latin America Update*.

Marilyn Buck received a Pen Prison Writing Prize (April 2001) for her volume of poetry, *Rescue the Word*. Her poems also appear in *Concrete Garden*, *Sojourner*, *BLU Magazine*, *Prosodia X*, 2001, and the anthologies *Hauling Up the Morning*, *Voices of Resistance*; *Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing*; and *Wall Tappings: An International Anthology of Women's Prison Writings, 200 A.D. to the Present*. Following the September 11, 2001, tragedy, under the orders of Attorney General John Ashcroft, she was taken out of general population in her Dublin, California, prison and placed in isolation for several weeks, denied contact with family, friends, and attorneys.

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NOTES

Research and draft for this biography were provided by Martha Oatis.

1. Lee Ross Heidhues, "Law 'N' Order Judge Presides at Trial of Accused BLA Member," *Sun Reporter*, 11 August 1973, N33.
2. Joseph B. Treatster, "Marilyn Buck: A Fugitive and Long a Radical," *New York Times*, 23 October 1981, B5.
3. Arnold H. Lubasch, "2 Ex-Fugitives Convicted of Roles in Fatal Armored-Truck Robbery," *New York Times*, 12 May 1988, B4.
4. "Marilyn Buck," in *Can't Jail the Spirit: Political Prisoners in the U.S.*, 5th ed. (Chicago: Committee to End the Marion Lockdown, 2002), 193.
5. Silvia Baraldini was repatriated to Italy where she is under house arrest; Mutulu Shakur and Sekou Odinga are incarcerated in the United States. See Shakur's biography in this volume.
6. "Marilyn Buck Page," *Prison Activist Resource Center*, www.prisonactivist.org/pps+pows/marilynbuck/ (19 Apr. 2002).
7. See "Marilyn Buck," *Can't Jail the Spirit*, 5th edition (Chicago: Committee to End Marion Lockdown, 2002), 193. In 1973, Marilyn Buck received a fifteen-year sentence; in 1985, a five-year sentence for a felony, transporting firearms; a five-year sentence for failure to return from furlough; fifty years for Assata Shakur's escape and Brink's robbery; in 1990, ten years for the Capitol bombing. The total of eighty-five years—minus five years served concurrently—resulted in an eighty-year prison term.
8. Conversation with Laura Whitehorn, 25 March 2002.

The Struggle for Status under International Law: U.S. Political Prisoners and the Political Offense Exception to Extradition

INTRODUCTION

In the following paper I discuss how I came to study international law and the political status of prisoners. I begin with my relationship to the history of the legal development of the status question inside the U.S., and from my own experience. Though not academically trained in international law, all of my previous political education—both experiential and formal—prepared me for this learning process.

I conclude with the collective work of my codefendants, Dr. Mutulu Shakur, my own, and others as we labor to produce a legal brief in response to Judge Charles S. Haight's questions regarding "The Political Offense Exception to Extradition (POEE)," and legal and political status, i.e. standing as political prisoners and/or prisoners of war.¹ I did not do the majority of the writing. I had to appear for trial every day, rising at 4:00 AM to change into my court clothes in order to be transported from the jail to the courthouse. I did not attend legal meetings until after 6:00 or 7:00 PM, after I had returned from court and changed back into prison uniform. Other political prisoners held with us at the Metropolitan Correction Center in New York City (MCC-NY) contributed to this collective product.

NEW LEFT ACTIVISM

In the 1960s the U.S. was ablaze with social and political conflict and strife. The Civil Rights movement exploded into the Black Power and Black Liberation movement. Demonstrations for civil rights and political rights escalated into demands for self-determination. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed by the U.S. in 1948, reflected on the official level of social, political and economic struggles worldwide, including in the United States. In 1966, the UN International Covenant on Civil Rights and Political Rights was elaborated. It too responded to post-World War II anti-colonial struggles, articulating some of the demands and aspirations of oppressed and exploited peoples worldwide. Here in the U.S. activists had been demanding civil rights since before the return of Black troops from WWII to Jim Crow America; now activists were demonstrating against apartheid, sitting in at lunch counters and traveling South as Freedom Riders to challenge whites only, and protesting against the U.S. war in Vietnam. The Black Panther Party (BPP) demanded the right to self-determination and to self-defense for Black people; in one electrifying demonstration in 1967, they stood with firearms before the Califor-

nia State House in Sacramento. Civil disobedience as well as active resistance burgeoned. Activists were arrested, went to jail, got bail and continued social protests.

By the end of the 1960s, political activists were being imprisoned for their radical challenge to the status quo. The questions about prisons and prisoners, and the role of incarceration in the suppression of political dissent and opposition, rose to the forefront. More and more political militants and activists spent years in jail awaiting trial or as convicted persons—Huey P. Newton and countless other Black Panthers, Ahmed Evans of the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), draft resisters, Puerto Rican Nationalists, and North American anti-imperialists, anti-war activists and pacifists. Thousands of political activists were inducted into Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) files and logged on to jail and prison rolls. They were incarcerated with other women and men who had originally been imprisoned for social and economic offenses—social prisoners. Prisoners were being treated as beasts, not men (or women). Some of those prisoners became politically conscious and struggled for human rights within the prisons.

Those of us in the political and social movements who were not in jail or prison poured a lot of energy into supporting all those women and men who had fallen into the hands of the State's repressive apparatus—the "criminal justice" system. In that period, we made little distinction about "political status": if one was in the State's clutches and/or was resisting dehumanization, support was given. By the early 1970s a debate began on who was or was not a political prisoner.

AN EXISTENTIAL QUESTION: THE EXPERIENCE OF POLITICAL DETENTION

In 1973, the question of who and what is a political prisoner became an existential question for me. As an anti-imperialist and an internationalist, I supported and worked in solidarity with Black Liberation forces including the Black Liberation Army (BLA). Suddenly, in the dawn hours of March 22, 1973, with the kicking-in of a door, I became a political prisoner. I was convicted for buying firearms and sentenced to ten years in prison, unheard of at the time for such a minor offense (but in retrospect a short sentence for the betrayal of white supremacist culture). I went from trial to trial and was moved from jail to jail, isolation cell to isolation cell. I finally in the fall of 1974, for no other reason than "political association," was dumped into the then-experimental behavior modification program at the Federal Women's Prison at Alderson, West Virginia. After more than thirteen months of "behavior modification" (which consisted primarily of isolation and segregation with no discernible goals to be met to tend the process), I was released into the general population. There I met Lolita Lebron, the Puerto Rican Nationalist political prisoner who had been in prison since March 1, 1954. For several years we spent a lot of time together. From her I learned about other women political prisoners who had been there at different times—other Puerto Rican Nationalists such as

Blanca Canales, Isabel Rosado, and American Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, a Communist. I met another political prisoner there as well, a pacifist Roman Catholic nun, Sister Jane. Most importantly, I learned from Lolita resistance, commitment and about being a political prisoner. She was a shining example of commitment to her people and of human dignity under adverse conditions.

I had experience as a political prisoner, including the particular repression we were subject to at times. (Those imprisoned for political actions and offenses are considered to be the "worst of the worst." We are subject to preventive detention or astronomically high bails; courtroom security is used to prejudice the jury; we receive disproportionate sentences; and we are subjected to isolation and efforts to break or destroy those who do not repent our political ideologies.) Nevertheless I had little knowledge of the history of political prisoners in the U.S. I began to read about the history and traditions of U.S. political prisoners: the *Amistad* rebellion and trial, Joe Hill, Emma Goldman, Sacco and Vanzetti, the Rosenbergs, Francisco Flores Magon, Don Pedro Albizu Campos and Don Juan Corretjer, the Communists imprisoned because of the HUAC (House Un-American Activities Committee) "red scare" hearings in the 1950s, as well as countless others.

In 1978, I was granted a work furlough. I did not return. I continued my political activism underground until 1985 when I was captured.

NATIONAL LIBERATION, INTERNATIONAL LAW AND POLITICAL PRISONERS

The concept of political prisoner is as old as the history of political conflicts between and within nations and states. That prisoners of such conflicts were recognized as political prisoners has not always been a certainty. Most nation-states unequivocally condemn the political opposition and militancy as "criminal." Nonetheless, at the end of the Second World War, European and American statesmen sat down to define war, conflicts and the rules of war for the modern world, as well as to outlaw genocide and civilian murder and displacement. The Nuremberg Charter, as well as the Geneva Conventions of 1949, were elaborated.

The rule of and interpretation of international law have become broader in reach since the Second World War. For those who have been imprisoned because of their involvement in struggles against colonial oppression and for human rights—including inside the U.S. itself, it has been necessary to demand and advocate for recognition and inclusion of those struggles under international law. Forces of national liberation and anti-imperialism—excluded from the community of nations because of their colonial status—had staged wars of national liberation. Anti-colonial warfare—unconventional warfare—challenged the narrowness of the conventions, given that the conventions were elaborated relative to conventional warfare in the imperialist, developed nations. Many of the progressive changes in international law have been primarily impelled by those nations most excluded—the for-

mer and current colonies. (The Soviet Union had argued that all wars that were "just" might not adhere to prevailing legal standards; thus while wars of national liberation were considered just they did not necessarily gain UN support until such time as it was clear about the outcome of many of those wars.) On June 8, 1977, the Additional Protocols (I and II) to the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949, were adopted by the Diplomatic Conference on Reaffirmation and Development of International Humanitarian Law applicable to Armed Conflict. These Protocols expanded the Geneva Convention to protect those fighting against colonialism and foreign domination. The spirit of Article 45, as well as the entire Additional Protocol I, was to confer as liberally as possible prisoner of war protections on legitimate national liberation combatants. The U.S. refused to sign Protocol I. As was stated in our *Memorandum in Support of Defense Motion to Dismiss the Indictment*, November 2, 1987:

A major reason why the United States refused to ratify this Protocol was because the spirit and intent of the Protocol conflicts with the government's repressive approach that uses law to criminalize participants in liberation struggles.²

POLITICAL PRISONERS IN THE 1960s

In the 1960s, political movements had declared that those who had acted in concert with those movements and were imprisoned for their actions were political prisoners. Many Black Liberation Movement "cases" were supported worldwide, especially those of Angela Davis, Huey P. Newton, and the Panther 21. Weathermen, pacifists, draft resisters and anti-imperialists also became political prisoners. Some social prisoners, like George Jackson and the Soledad Brothers, and later the San Quentin Six and Ruchell Magee, had actively opposed the racism and inhumane conditions inside prisons. They had become politicized and had paid heavy prices. They too were recognized and supported as political prisoners. The U.S. judiciary and the repressive apparatus officially denied the political nature of all those cases, relying on the FBI's Counterintelligence Program, COINTELPRO, to quell political dissent and to maintain or restore the status quo in society.

After the defeat of the U.S. by the Vietnamese in 1975, and its other losses in Southeast Asia, the State's repressive apparatus intensified its program to restore "order" in U.S. society. It sought to reassure or deceive the international community, as well as its own citizens, that the U.S. was indeed the leading stable force of democracy and human rights worldwide.

In the early 1970s, in the course of the domestic battles against the war in Vietnam, when the Weather Underground bombed the Capitol, it was treated as a political attack. Thereafter, during the Reagan regime, in response to ongoing domestic left political struggles, the State reconfigured its definition of "terrorism" to include political actions of dissent, opposition and resistance. Thus, in 1983 when the Cap-

itol was bombed, it was decried and propagandized as a "terrorist" attack although the action did not fall under the Geneva Convention's definition of terrorism; i.e. military acts of violence against the civilian population to inspire fear and subjugation. Those who were arrested or captured for political actions and protests were demonized as terrorists, not recognized as political activists. They were subjected to extreme security measures: isolation, overwhelming use of armed force to regulate their movements as political prisoners, and a steady stream of media propaganda.

The process of delegitimization of political resistance was under way.

DIFFERENT DEFINITIONS (1): U.S. V. LEFT POLITICAL MOVEMENTS: COINTELPRO

The U.S. government asserts that there are no political prisoners in the United States. It maintains this assertion in relation to countries with (military) dictatorships that are friendly to the U.S. While it may have signed, in part, the 1977 Additional Protocols, its practice has been to assert that political prisoners and prisoners of war (POWs) exist only in those countries that are considered inimical to or that impede U.S. interests, such as Cuba and Libya. The U.S. response to international covenants, the Geneva Conventions in particular, is to say that there are no conditions or situations of conflict within the U.S. that would result in political prisoners. It refuses to acknowledge its colonial relationships or conflicts with Puerto Rico, Native Americans, or African descendants of slaves. In 1988, in the course of the RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization) conspiracy case against Dr. Mutulu Shakur and me, the Executive branch of the government submitted a brief in response to an order by Judge Charles S. Haight, which states:

it is well accepted in customary international law, the Geneva Convention, and the Protocols that the use of force by the regular military forces of a State in resisting rebels or insurgents by force is need[ed] before any situation can be properly described as an armed conflict (whether international or internal).³

It is the view of the Government that the actual application of the Geneva Conventions requires a political judgment on whether an international or internal armed conflict is present. Whether such a conflict of hostilities exists in a particular case presents a question that is appropriately reserved to the political branches of governments.⁴

Thus, those persons arrested for their political activities are seen and treated as outlaws and criminals. To admit that there are political prisoners would open the U.S. to scrutiny over its own anti-democratic and repressive practices toward its own populations (and other nations). This would be tantamount to officially acknowledging that serious national conflicts exist within its borders.

... [A]ny decision that an armed conflict exists would have serious foreign policy and legal ramifications. Under traditional international law, for example, it would give rise to neutral rights, and thus confer the right on the belligerents (e.g. the United States and the "Republic of New Afrika") to search and seize certain neutral vessels engaged in commerce to ensure that contraband (e.g. weapons) is not being shipped to the other belligerent. It is extremely unlikely that other countries would tolerate action by the so-called "Republic of New Afrika."⁵

Despite its denials of the existence of political conflicts, the government's repressive measures and programs to monitor, control and destroy rising political movements and struggles is well-documented. COINTELPRO was the government's most developed political police program to fend off and undermine those political movements that have demanded the same liberation and justice advocated by the U.S. in those areas of the world where it has sought to gain both economic and political footholds. It arose out of the U.S.'s post-World War II "cold war" program of political control and repression. Its antecedents lie in FBI programs such as COMINFIL (for communist infiltrators operating) in the 1950s in the wake of the HUAC hearings and imprisonment of "communists" who refused to bow before its ideological inquisition, coupled with the trial and execution of the Rosenbergs for espionage. Among its earliest targets was the Puerto Rican Independence movement, the Civil Rights movement, and Communists and Socialists who had not capitulated before HUAC. By the late 1960s, COINTELPRO had issued its infamous dicta about preventing the rise of a Black Messiah and the necessity to "neutralize" any potential Black leadership or movement.

Under the umbrella of COINTELPRO, the FBI, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and local police agencies employed nefarious, illegal activities against political activists across the Left spectrum, including white Leftists that supported the Black struggles and opposed the war in Vietnam. If the local police agencies were not before that time invested as a political, military force in what the U.S. government characterized as "actions to protect U.S. democracy against Communism," they quickly took on that mantle, particularly in communities of oppressed national "minorities."

After some of its most blatant activities were exposed and protested by the targets of its attacks, a Congressional investigation—the Church committee—was initiated. "COINTELPRO essentially federalized the local police for its politically repressive purposes, and military intelligence played a major role in the successful implementation of the program."⁶

Throughout the 1970s, the National Black Task Force for COINTELPRO Litigation and Research, led by Dr. Shakur and Muntu Matsimela, played an important role in uncovering some of the government's illegal actions against political activists and political prisoners. Through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) a number of abuses were uncovered and a civil suit, *Clark v Gray*, was filed through the efforts of the Black Task Force. It was subsequently settled by the government

before trial. (The Task Force also played an instrumental role in building political prisoner support work.) In the late 1970s, COINTELPRO was ostensibly dismantled after such scrutiny, but the Joint Terrorist Task Force (JTTF) was created to take over the functions of COINTELPRO and continue its program of intensified repression.

DIFFERENT DEFINITIONS (2): LEFT POLITICAL MOVEMENTS V. U.S.

Where one stands in the world shapes and defines what one sees as reality. Those of us who believe in human rights, including the right to self-determination for peoples and nations, have a different worldview, experience and definition of political prisoners and prisoners of war. This worldview is diametrically opposed to the U.S. view of both international and domestic law.

We recognize that there has been an ongoing, historical conflict within the body politic of the U.S.A. Founded on genocide and slavery under the guise of "Manifest Destiny," the United States developed as the dominant modern capitalist nation-state, and as a profoundly anti-democratic, white supremacist society with internal and external colonies. This fundamental anti-democracy shaped late U.S. twentieth-century strategies to maintain power and a modicum of social stability.

The United States has never redressed the injustices of slavery, neither through reparations nor cessation of hostilities against Black communities nationwide. It has not withdrawn from Puerto Rico despite repeated UN votes for decolonization. Both situations are unresolved political conflicts. Therefore, the U.S. is fundamentally in violation of common international law as it has developed since the Second World War, despite the fact that it ostensibly subscribes to the rule of international law while claiming paradoxically that it is not bound by international law.

International law is part of our law, and must be ascertained and administered by the courts of justice of appropriate jurisdiction.⁷

It is now established that customary law in the United States is a kind of federal law, and like treaties and other international agreements, it is accorded supremacy over State law by Article VI of the Constitution.⁸

The government argues that the judicial branch only enforces that which the legislative and executive branches devise as current law. On the one hand the State represents the body of law as the immutable neutral foundation of society. On the other hand, it denies the political and selective nature of the law. Laws had to be forcibly changed to outlaw slavery (reinstated in the Thirteenth Amendment, for prisoners), to protect workers' and immigrants' rights. Political movements and their political prisoners have had not only to struggle for human rights and against

exploitation and oppression in the social-political realm, but have had to do battle in the legal realm as well.

Over a period of twenty years the concept of "political prisoner" developed from the practice and experience of people detained and imprisoned for their beliefs and actions. By the late 1970s, there were prisoners from the Black Liberation movement—the Panthers in particular—along with several U.S. anti-imperialists and anarchists, who had been imprisoned since the late 1960s for their political activities. Once the 1977 Additional Protocols were signed, political prisoners began to demand that they be treated as political prisoners and prisoners of war according to international law. The concept of the political offenses and political "crimes" began to be integrated into legal defenses in order to challenge criminal charges, criminalization, and the attempts of the U.S. to hide its endemic social-political contradictions and conflicts.

These legal claims—as challenges to the criminalization of political opposition—eventually became sharper and more clearly defined. The definition of U.S. political prisoners was agreed to by a number of movements (and their political prisoners) concerned with national self-determination, justice and human dignity. The Introduction to the fourth edition of *Can't Jail the Spirit* discusses the concept of political prisoner status:

Political prisoners exist as a result of real political and social conflicts in the society. There is no society free of contradictions and therefore no society that does not have political prisoners. The absurd position of the U.S. government that it alone has no political prisoners is consistent with its position that there are no legitimate social or political movements struggling for fundamental change. The strategy of criminalization and isolation of political prisoners, i.e. the denial of their existence in part allows the U.S. to propagate the lie that U.S. society has achieved social peace, and that whatever dissent there is functions solely within the existent bourgeois democratic framework.⁹

Our movements here in the U.S., as well as liberation-directed movements in other nations and even some foreign states, are clear that there are political prisoners and POWs in the U.S. After every major attack by the State in which political activists have been arrested, we have mounted a defense struggle in the realm of the domestic, criminal court both to challenge the criminal charges and to argue for treatment as such under international law.

In 1977, William Morales, a Puerto Rican *independentista* was arrested in New York after a pipe bomb exploded prematurely in his hands. He refused to participate in a "criminal" trial based on his declared status as a prisoner of war under the Geneva Conventions. This case was one of the first to challenge the right of the U.S. to try him under criminal because as a colonial fighter he was eligible for POW status under international law. Morales [who escaped to Cuba] relied on the eighty-year history of struggle against Puerto Rico's colonial status, led by Don Pedro Albizu Campos and the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party, five militants who were at that time still imprisoned after at least twenty-four years of incarceration.

Within a few years thereafter, a large number of other political militants were captured, arrested and charged as "criminals" or "terrorists"—two terms increasingly conflated in order to heighten fears of terrorist attacks on civilians and civil society and thereby to justify brutal, inhumane treatment of prisoners.

BUT FOR THE EXPERIENCE

Had I not been captured, I would not have studied international law relating to political conflict and political prisoners/POWs. The experience of being a political prisoner motivated my studies. Prior to my arrest, I did not see such study to be my responsibility. My attentions and efforts were focused elsewhere in other arenas: I was immersed in other strategies both to support and to free political prisoners, many of whom had been subjected to harsh, extreme treatment inside prison.

Once again captive, Dr. Mutulu Shakur mobilized me to study international law in order to advance the struggle in international terms and to better attack politically the indictment against us. During my first trial, for escape, in West Virginia, I acted as my own attorney. I argued a "necessity defense" that had been developed at the end of the 1970s, principally by the prisoners of the anti-nuclear movement. The "necessity defense" was based on the Nuremberg Principles embodied in the Treaty of London, to which the U.S. is a signatory. It provides that

individuals have international duties which transcend the national obligations of obedience imposed by the individual state.¹⁰

The principles recognized in the Judgment of the Nuremberg Tribunal impose on individuals the affirmative duty to prevent the commission of crimes as enumerated therein at Article 6.¹¹

Investigating the "necessity defense," I began my engaged analysis of international law and political prisoner status. Although I had prepared a necessity defense with the help and advice of attorneys, I was not allowed to present it except to the extent that I could elaborate the concept in my opening and closing statements. I was convicted, sentenced and returned to New York.

A STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL LAW: THE NATURE OF CONFLICT AND POLITICAL STATUS

In New York, I was to stand trial for a RICO conspiracy. I began to prepare my defense case with my attorneys, and was fully engaged in all aspects. I focused on challenging the evidence, which we did successfully, initially, at lower court levels. My knowledge or understanding of the international legal tradition that defined the

concept of political prisoner was still limited. However, I was in the company of a number of other political prisoners and POWs—Grand jury resisters, comrades from the New Afrikan Independence Movement, other North American anti-imperialists, Puerto Rican political prisoners, as well as an Irish Republican Army member, Joe Doherty. For years Joe had been fighting in the U.S. courts for political asylum against the demand by the British government that he be returned to political detention there. He had based his legal battle in international law and the Political Offense Exception to Extradition (POEE).

In interactions limited by security attempts to keep us separate, political prisoners discussed both the international and domestic laws concerning the definition and status of U.S. political prisoners. Recognizing the import of the POEE, Dr. Shakur began to explore its possibilities and educated the political prisoners, attorneys, and law student paralegals. We analyzed the history of political prisoners' challenges to U.S. criminal law, read previous briefs, and translated that history into a legal argument. Under Dr. Shakur's direction, an argument was developed that the POEE must not be limited to extradition only since it is the method used in most Western alliance countries as a guide to evaluate the political character of an offense and its common criminal elements.

The conspiracy charge against us was defined by the U.S. Justice Department as an enterprise for political purposes; that is, to free political prisoners and provide economic support for the New Afrikan Independence Movement. Nevertheless, the conspiracy and the substantive acts and counts were indicted criminal offenses. We participated in the trial to challenge the evidence against us. We also consistently showed the political nature of the acts, particularly in cross-examination of the government's central witness, a former political associate of Dr. Shakur who had succumbed to FBI/JTTF coercion and had been well-paid to elaborate upon the prosecution's conspiracy case.

We argued for political prisoner status under international law based on the Geneva Conventions (1949), incorporated the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,¹² and developed arguments using the Political Offense Exception to Extradition (POEE). Led by Dr. Shakur and Joe Doherty, we studied these particular aspects of international law. We referred to other political challenges to criminalization by other political prisoners and POWs including William Morales and Sekou Odinga, a New Afrikan POW comrade and codefendant in our RICO indictment.

At the beginning of our trial in November 1987, Dr. Shakur filed a "Motion to Dismiss the Indictment" based on his status as a POW. I did not seek POW status because for a Euro-American citizen of the U.S., not a colonial subject, the same arguments could not be made relative to a "civil" war. In an earlier trial it had been decided, for political reasons, that the (white) North American anti-imperialists, though acting in solidarity and in concert with the New Afrikan Independence forces, would declare themselves as political prisoners and allies.

Dr. Shakur argued that African peoples inside the United States constituted a

New Afrikan nation by virtue of their historical relation to the land in the South, and that as a citizen and militant of the Republic of New Afrika, he had a legitimate right to defend his nation against the white supremacist, genocidal war that the U.S. had been waging against New Afrikan people as colonial subjects. In his petition, *Memorandum in Support of Defense Motion to Dismiss the Indictment*, he argued that the Political Offense Exception to Extradition could be extended to political conflict inside the United States.

According to the Quinn Court, there are two distinct categories of political offenses: "pure political offenses" and "relative political offenses."

Pure political offenses are acts aimed or directed at the government and have none of the elements of ordinary crimes . . . The definitional problems focus around the second category of political offenses—the relative political offenses. These include "otherwise common crimes committed in connection with a political act," or common crimes . . . committed for political motives or in a political context.¹³

It is the fact that the insurgents are seeking to change their governments that makes the political offense exception applicable, not the reasons for wishing to do so or the nature of the acts by which they hope to accomplish that goal.¹⁴

He argued that within the POEE, treaties and international norms, there are various tests known as the Anglo-American test, which are the primary tests used by the judiciary to evaluate the character of the acts charged by the country demanding extradition of the defendants.

In January 1988, after the Government had filed its response to Dr. Shakur's motion, the Judge directed the Government to answer five questions "regarding the possibly political character of the acts charged in the indictment." (See SSS 82 CR. 312-CSH, *Memorandum Opinion and Order* by Charles S. Haight, Judge, Southern District of New York, January 19, 1988.) Those questions were:

1. What role, if any, did the United States play in the development of the 1977 protocols proposed as amendments to the 1949 Geneva Prisoner of War Convention?
2. What is the history and present status of the United States' position with respect to the 1977 protocols?
3. Do the 1977 protocols reflect the current state of international law on the issue of when prisoner-of-war treatment must be accorded to accused persons?
4. Assuming that the United States has not adopted the 1977 protocols, but that the protocols do reflect current international law, is this Court required or permitted to decline to analyze the present motion under the principles enunciated therein? Cf. *Filartiga v. Pena-Irala*, 630 F.2d 876 (2d. Cir. 1980)
5. Analyzed under the principles enunciated in the 1977 protocols, should the criminal enterprise charged in the indictment be regarded as an insurgency?

The AUSAs—Attorneys for the United States of America or federal prosecutors—forwarded the Court's order to the Department of State to make the responding brief. Abraham D. Sofaer, Legal Advisor to the Department of State, together with others, including the Chief of the Office of the Judge Advocate General of the Department of the Army and Office of the General Counsel of the Department of Defense responded.

The government's political brief argued essentially that any decision on POW (or political) status or declaration that a conflict exists is reserved to the political branches:

... even were the court otherwise inclined to address the defendant's contention, it should take into account that there is an "absence of judicially discoverable and manageable standards" for determining whether hostilities or armed conflict exist for purposes of such laws and treaties.¹⁵

The government dismissed outright any condition of the Political Offense Exception to Extradition as not applicable.

The political offense exception referred to by the defendants is relevant as a matter of law solely in cases involving extradition. Under no circumstances is it a defense to prosecution in the United States. (Cites omitted) (*Government Brief*, 2)

We responded to that brief. In March 1988, we had requested that a number of potential political prisoner witnesses for the defense case be brought to New York. The Judge ordered Sekou Odinga and Cecil Ferguson, both comrades already convicted in our own case; David Gilbert, an anti-imperialist comrade who had been convicted in New York state courts for participation in an action that included both New Afrikans and North American anti-imperialists and was one of the substantive acts charged in our own case; Susan Rosenberg, an anti-imperialist comrade indicted in the instant RICO conspiracy but who had been *nolled* [i.e., the government chose not to prosecute but declined to drop charges] in order to focus the prosecution on Dr. Shakur and me; Nuh Washington, a Black Liberation Army combatant imprisoned since 1971 in NY state prisons; and Geronimo ji Jaga Pratt, a Black Panther Minister of Defense who was falsely imprisoned for twenty-seven years as a target of COINTELPRO.

We held joint legal meetings nightly after Dr. Shakur and I returned from court. Each evening was a legal education session on points of international law regarding political prisoners, definitions of combatants and non-combatants and on the POEE and its possible application to our situation inside the U.S. We approached the subject from the point of view that the court had the discretion to address this issue:

The "political offense exception" to extradition arose in Europe and America because democratic governments supported the right of individuals "to resort to political asylum to foster political change." The underlying tenets of domestic extradition law arise from

(1) the desire to insulate the executive involvement in the extradition determination, which is made by the Court; and, (2) the political decision that the executive should not help another country suppress its own internal political dissent. These concerns have governed American extradition policies for 150 years.¹⁶

In order to respond to Judge Haight's questions and challenge the government's response to those same questions we immersed ourselves deeper into the case law and the theories behind international conventions and laws, in particular the Political Offense Exception to Extradition, given that the major point of contention was whether the crimes charged were political or not.

By the time we had read and discussed a significant amount of case law and international covenants related to political conflict, political offenses and judicial authority, we felt confident to write a response brief to answer the government's misrepresentations of international law. We were advised by our attorneys, Chokwe Lumumba, Jill Soffiyah Elijah and Judith Holmes, each of whom brought her or his own area of expertise and experience. Our response brief began by arguing that the U.S. political stance relative to Protocol I was based on its own history and policies. It had historically denied that political conflicts have existed internally. We argued that

The real issue, assuming that the Protocols do reflect current international law, is whether there are controlling executive or legislative acts that preclude the Court from recognizing international law applicable to this case.¹⁷

We also challenged the government's assertion that if Congress doesn't ratify a law of nations then that law is not controlling.

The Senate's failure to ratify the Protocols means that these amendments do not have the status of a United States treaty. But, if the Protocols do indeed express contemporary international law, the Senate's non-ratification merely means that no codification on how such international law may or may not apply in the United States has been established.¹⁸

In response to Judge Haight's final question, we argued that the Black Liberation struggle was indeed an ongoing internal conflict.

Given the body of factual data in defendant's [Dr. Shakur] affidavit about the war against New Afrikans and the Black Liberation Movement, and the massive documentation the Church Committee revealed that chronicled the government's "secret war" involving the Army, the CIA, the FBI, the IRS and the state and local police against the Black Liberation Movement, such actions taken against any foreign nation would clearly constitute overt "acts of war" in international law. Any person captured would be considered a prisoner of war.¹⁹

The government's reply to the Court's fifth question, asking whether the criminal enterprise charged in the indictment should be regarded as an insurgency as analyzed under the 1977 Protocols, evaded the central issue: whether the conspiracy charged is a part of the ongoing conflict between Black people in America and the United States government. . . . The RICO statute has become a tool for criminalizing political movements that has enabled the government to define the New Afrikan Independence Movement as a criminal enterprise.²⁰

Dr. Shakur posited that the Court could grant relief under the provisions for international armed conflict because the requirements for such an evaluation existed despite the U.S. government's denials; i.e., the Political Offense Exception to Extradition could be applied by the Court to grant us political status.

In *re Doherty*, 599 F. Supp. 270, 27 (S.D.N.Y. 1984) elaborated a more flexible standard for applying the political offense exception. It stated:

The court rejects the notion that the political offense exception is limited to actual armed insurrections or more traditional and overt military hostilities . . .²¹

Finally we made an "interest of justice argument and application" in which we argued that the case presented by the State pointed out the relative political nature of the acts and of the defendants. We asked that the Court hold fact-finding hearings on our political status.

In the Documentation/Appendix, *The Defendants' Memorandum in Reply to the Government's Response to the January 19, 1988 Order of Judge Charles S. Haight* (as printed in *Wazo Weusi*) lays out all of our arguments based on the substance of the learning experience that occurred not only for myself but for all of us involved, both defendants and attorneys.

AFTERWORD

Both Dr. Shakur and I were found guilty of the RICO conspiracy and all the substantive acts therein. Post trial, as part of the defense's sentencing briefings, Judge Haight ruled against Dr. Shakur's POW petition and our joint request to be treated as political prisoners and to be allowed to go into exile to a country that would grant us political asylum. However, he accepted the government's argument that he had no jurisdiction to rule on our political status given there was no precedent in U.S. law not related to extradition. He carried forward the criminalization process by sentencing us under criminal law guidelines.

In 1989, a campaign to demand amnesty for all political prisoners and POWs (of the progressive and Left movements)—Freedom Now—was launched. In 1990, the campaign culminated in an international tribunal on U.S. political prisoners and prisoners of war. The work we had done was useful in that tribunal. Nevertheless, the work we did remains to be evaluated under changed political conditions. Per-

haps our work will contribute to changes in the political conditions and, ultimately, in the law itself. Radical change generally precedes any change in the law. The law is the foundation stone of the political and social order as it has been and is not what it is to become.

NOTES

Unedited version originally published in *Prior Learning Component #2* (Fall/Winter 1999).

1. *Editor's note:* The Political Offense Exception to Extradition (POEE) was established as international law in the Geneva Convention. Article 44 combined with Additional Protocol I (1977) of the Geneva Convention expands the categories of individuals who can be defined as prisoners of war. The United States has refused to obey the POEE; such action would acknowledge that there are political crimes in the United States. Mutulu Shakur, Marilyn Buck, Geronimo Pratt, Albert "Nuh" Washington, Sekou Odinga, Cecilio Chui Ferguson El, Susan Rosenberg, and David Gilbert, "Prisoners of War: The Legal Standing of Members of National Liberation Movements," in *Cages of Steel: The Politics of Imprisonment in the United States*, ed. Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall (Washington, D.C.: Maison-neuve, 1992).

2. *Defendants' Memorandum*, 128.

3. (Cites omitted.) See: *Government Brief in Response to Memorandum Order of January 19, 1988*, 16.

4. (Cites omitted.) *Government Brief*, 19.

5. *Government Brief*, 22-23.

6. See *The Select Committee Report*. *Supra* at 785-835. (*Defendants' Memorandum*, 134).

7. *The Paquete Habana*, 175 U.S. 677, [1900].

8. Restatement [Third] of the Foreign Relations Law of the U.S., Part I, Ch. 2, [1987] [Introductory Note].

9. *Can't Jail the Spirit*, 4th ed. (Chicago: Committee to End the Marion Lockdown), 19.

10. *Treaty of London*, August 8, 1945, 59 Stat. 1544, 1548 Article 8.

11. Brief Supporting Charges that the United States Federal Government has Acted as an International Criminal Conspiracy and a Criminal Organizations with Regard to the Political Incarceration and Commission of Human Rights Violations Against White, North American Revolutionaries and Activists, Marilyn Kalman, Attorney at Law, San Francisco, CA, October 2-4, 1992, 2.

12. G. A. Resolution 2200A[XXI], 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. [No. 16] at 52, U.N. Doc. A/6316 [1966], 999 U.N.T.S. 171, entered into force Mar. 23, 1976.

13. *Quinn v Robinson*, *supra* at 793-794, cited in SSS 82-CR.312 CSH, Memorandum in Support of Defense Motion to Dismiss the Indictment, November 2, 1987, 44-45.

14. *Quinn v Robinson*, 783 F. 2d at 805, Memorandum in Support of Defense Motion to Dismiss the Indictment, November 2, 1987, 47.

15. (Case law cites omitted.) *Government Brief*, 24.

16. *Defendants' Memorandum*, 138.

17. *Defendants' Memorandum*, 131.

18. *Defendants' Memorandum*, 132.

19. *Defendants' Memorandum*, 133.

20. *Defendants' Memorandum*, 135.

21. *Defendants' Memorandum*, 139.

Chapter Fifteen

Rita Bo Brown

Born in 1947, Bo (Rita Darlene) Brown grew up in a white working-class neighborhood in Klanmath, Oregon. Her first experience with the U.S. prison system came when she was sentenced to seven months at Terminal Island Penitentiary for stealing forty dollars from the post office in Seattle where she worked. Upon release, she returned to Seattle and became involved in prison and lesbian rights work, helping to found Leftist Lezzies, an organization to combat the invisibility of lesbians in the antiwar movement. Eventually, Brown became a member of the George Jackson Brigade; her involvement with the Brigade and its armed robberies led to eight additional years of incarceration.¹

Based in Seattle, the Brigade emerged as a multiracial, nonhomophobic, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist underground organization. It was largely composed of individuals who were former prisoners, or had used or advocated armed struggle in opposition to U.S. policies and in solidarity with Native struggles for sovereignty, Seattle Auto Workers' strikes, and Washington State prisoners' human rights. In solidarity with the United Farm Workers, the Brigade allegedly bombed a Safeway supermarket; in support of the American Indian Movement, the organization allegedly bombed the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Everett, Washington, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) office in Tacoma, Washington.

The Brigade publicized the political nature of its actions through communiqués distributed to news media across the country, announcing the bombings and explaining their political motivations. Attempting to make a distinction between terrorism and the Brigade's actions, Brown asserted in an article in the feminist publication *Off Our Backs*:

Terrorism is armed action which deliberately and callously ignores the welfare of the people. It is the institutionalized sick violence of the ruling class and its police forces—i.e., the senseless bombings of Viet Nam; the Attica massacre; the Kent State massacre; the Jackson State massacre; the individual murders of Clifford Grover, Karen Silkwood, and George Jackson; the continuing murders and sterilizations of Native Americans and Puerto Ricans. . . . "Armed Struggle" is the use of controlled violence such as

armed occupations, kidnappings, prisoner escapes, armed robberies, bombings, etc. A primary factor is that concern for the welfare of innocent people is *always* a vital part of the planning and execution of these actions."²

Bo Brown was finally captured on November 4, 1977, in Seattle, Washington, and extradited to Oregon that month to stand trial. Although charged with five counts of robbery and two weapons charges, all remaining charges were dropped when, on January 11, 1978, Brown pleaded guilty to a 1977 armed robbery of a Wilsonville Branch of the National Bank of Oregon. The press often covered news of the Brigade's activities, yet the FBI allegedly withheld information from the media after Brown's arrest in order to limit publicity for the George Jackson Brigade. Limited media coverage made the organization of a political defense all the more difficult for Brown and her allies. Sentenced on February 21, 1978, to twenty years for robbery and an additional five years on the firearms charge, Brown appealed, arguing that she could not be sentenced to two consecutive terms for the same crime; the initial ruling was upheld.³

Once sentenced, Brown was held in solitary confinement in the Federal Correctional Institution in Pleasanton, California, until March 21, at which point she was transferred to the Federal Correctional Institution at Alderson, West Virginia. At Alderson, she was placed in the prison's Maximum Security Unit (MSU) in Davis Hall, which also housed Assata Shakur. Women in Davis Hall were locked in their cells the majority of the day, with exceptions for meals, two hours of personal visits, and, sometimes, for work.⁴ While housed in Davis Hall, arguably the first special control unit for political women in the federal system, Brown and other inmates attempted to publicize the unfair conditions of the unit. After pressure from progressive segments of the legal community, community activists, and inmate activists, the MSU was terminated as a program; however, it continued to be used as a general punitive segregation unit and, occasionally, as a control unit. (Held there in the 1980s were Lucy Rodriguez, Haydée Torress, Dylcia Pagán, and Laura Whitehorn.)⁵

After Brown was released from prison in 1987, she cofounded Out of Control Lesbian Committee to Support Women Political Prisoners, and began support work for people with AIDS in prison, and for battered women convicted of killing their abusers.⁶ Organized initially around the campaign to close the Lexington Control Unit for Women, Out of Control now works to support women political prisoners. Brown also participated in the Jericho '98 Campaign to Free Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War and the Norma Jean Croy Support Committee for the release of Norma Jean Croy, a Native lesbian wrongfully imprisoned for nineteen years. Brown has directed and produced *Shasta Woman*, a documentary on Croy's case.⁷

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White North American Political Prisoners

October 1992

I am very honored to be here today, at this tribunal condemning 500 years of genocide and celebrating 500 years of resistance. I came to speak about some thirty-five white political prisoners presently being held in U.S. prisons and jails—many of whom are imprisoned because of their solidarity with oppressed nations and peoples in the United States and around the world. I speak from experience and deep feeling, for I am a former political prisoner myself, having spent eight and a half years in federal prisons around the country because of my actions as a member of the George Jackson Brigade. In those years I was moved from prison to prison. During that time I spent almost a year in isolation in Davis Hall at Alderson.¹ This was the first special control unit for political women in the federal system. Sister Assata Shakur and I were held there along with reactionary and Nazi prisoners—the government's threat to us was very clear. I was also kept for extra long periods in isolation and threatened and harassed specifically because I am a Lesbian. This was not all that unusual treatment, however, for my experience mirrors that of all the political prisoners. Yet our very existence is still denied by the U.S. government and not seen or understood by most people in this country.

The strategy of the U.S. government towards all political prisoners and POWs held in prisons is to criminalize them—to disguise their political identities under the rhetoric of criminal activity. But they are not criminals. All of these white North American political prisoners have been convicted of and imprisoned for activities that are strictly political in nature. These political prisoners and POWs are not a new phenomenon but are part of the history of the resistance in the Americas. In fact, under international law as well as the Constitution of the United States, people not only have the right, but the absolute responsibility to resist the illegal policies and practices of the oppressor and colonizing nation. And that's what they have done.

The North American political prisoners draw on a history of resistance that includes the anti-slavery/abolitionist movement, those who helped in the Underground Railroad, women's rights activists, labor and working-class organizers, and supporters of anti-colonialism and anti-militarism. Some of their names are familiar: John Brown, Emma Goldman, Eugene Debs, Ruth Reynolds, and Ethel and Julius Rosenberg; but most of the names of our historical grandmothers and grandfathers remain unknown to us because the historians don't want us to know about them. Some of these political prisoners come from working-class or poor communities, some were already ex-cons, and still others were college students, but a common thread runs through all their stories—the decision to take action. Action in support of self-determination; action against racism; action against U.S. military and nuclear policy; action against apartheid in South Africa and action in solidarity

with workers and poor people around the world. In order to understand them and their situation better we have to go back a little in history.

If you were living in this country in the 1960s and 1970s, you had to be affected by the struggles for freedom and social justice. Products of those times, many of the women and men in prison today were active in support of the civil rights movement and were influenced by the demand for self-determination by Malcolm X and the organizing of Martin Luther King, both of whom would be assassinated by 1968. Others worked with the Black Panther Party (BPP), often in defense of BPP members who were imprisoned for political activities. Many came to work also with Native-American, Mexicano/Chicano, and other Third World liberation struggles. Along with millions of others, they consistently opposed U.S. policy in Vietnam and were part of the antiwar movement. There were mass demonstrations throughout the country, marches on Washington, student strikes, sit-ins, and the burning of draft cards. There were also thousands of acts of sabotage against academic, corporate, military, and government targets that ranged from property damage to bombings. This was also the period when women began to be more conscious about their own oppression and began to demand liberation and when Lesbians and gay men came out of the closet and went into the streets demanding an end to gay oppression.

During these years a prisoner's rights movement developed, led mostly by Black prisoners and with close ties to the BPP and other community groups. Many of the white political prisoners worked with these organizations and thus came to better understand the integral part that prisons play in this society. They came to understand this country needs to control its people and criminalize, jail, or kill those whom it either can't control or doesn't need. The government's response to this legitimate protest and sense of empowerment was swift, repressive and violent. COINTELPRO, the FBI's counter-intelligence program, was responsible for the destruction of the BPP and the disruption of the American Indian Movement. Hundreds of BPP members and other Black activists, like Fred Hampton and Bunchy Carter, were killed or jailed. The same was true for Native people struggling for sovereignty.

This period also saw the killing of students at Kent and Jackson State universities and the widespread use of grand jury witch hunts that were designed to further disrupt legal organizations. Out of these experiences came the understanding that U.S. society is based on the rape and plunder of Native lands, the expropriation of the life and labor of African slaves, and the class exploitation of European, Asian, and Mexican workers. People were enraged at the racism so basic to this country and were determined not to be a part of it. Many began to see that there was a connection between the colonialism here at home and the war of imperialism in Vietnam.

It was during this time that activists in various parts of the country independently decided to begin armed resistance, expropriations, and sabotage. These were difficult steps to take but were all done in pursuit of their vision for change. This vision included changing centuries-old oppressive practices that promote hatred and that

create psychological and physical damage and destruction. It meant creating a society based on self-determination for oppressed peoples both inside and outside the United States, based on an end to white supremacy, a society that was not based on class divisions. It meant creating a society where Lesbians and gay men could be proud of who they were. And it meant creating a non-sexist society where women could be equal, free, and unafraid. Finally all these people are driven by a vision of a future based not on greed and profit but one that truly answers people's needs.

This vision and spirit of resistance continued to move North Americans to action during the 1970s and 1980s. Thousands of people organized to resist the building of nuclear weapons, the intervention in Nicaragua and El Salvador, and in solidarity with Black forces against apartheid in South Africa. Many whites demonstrated and organized against racism and the growth of the Klan and other white supremacist groups. Thousands of people signed pledges of resistance to participate in civil disobedience if Nicaragua was invaded and participated in these acts as intervention in Central America increased. Women marched *en masse* against cutbacks in reproductive rights and protected abortion clinics against attacks. Lesbians and gay men demanded that the society deal with the AIDS pandemic and pushed for broader acceptance of Lesbian and gay rights. Again, during the Gulf War, thousands of white people joined in the streets protesting U.S. policy.

Not much has changed. We can understand the desire to resist very well. Genocidal conditions are increasing for Blacks and other communities of color. There is a rise of police brutality, drugs, and jailings and, as we all know, dramatic cuts to social services. Violence against women is increasing—a woman gets raped every two minutes. The right-wing scapegoats and whips up hysteria against gays and Lesbians with a propaganda campaign for their "family values." Abortion is all but gone; the courts are making one right-wing decision after another; and if we don't look out, soon we won't even have air we can breathe or earth we can stand on.

Before we get more specific about who the prisoners are, we'd like to take time to define what we mean by political prisoner. For some of us, this definition means those in prison as a direct result of their political actions, affiliations, and beliefs. Still others wish to extend that definition to those imprisoned for social crimes who have become politicized while inside prison and who therefore suffer extra repression for it. Some of us also think it important to extend the definition of political prisoner to those imprisoned for their sexual orientation (adopted by Amnesty International in 1992) and to those imprisoned for defending themselves against and/or fighting their abusers, such as women imprisoned for killing their batterers.

So let's get down to specifics. First, there are prisoners who consider themselves to be revolutionary anti-imperialists. The Jonathan Jackson-Sam Melville Brigade and United Freedom Front (UFF) were armed clandestine organizations that emerged from the experiences of working-class people in poor communities, in the military, and in prison.² The Jackson-Melville Brigade was held responsible for a number of bombings of government and corporate offices in the mid- to late-1970s. These actions raised the demands of independence for Puerto Rico and an end to

U.S. support for apartheid in South Africa, among other issues. The UFF operated from the early to mid-1980s and demanded the end of governmental and corporate support for South Africa, an end to U.S. intervention in Central America, and freedom for all political prisoners and POWs in U.S. prisons. Today the people charged with these acts are known as the "Ohio 7." They include Raymond Levasseur, Thomas Manning (both Vietnam Vets who had spent years in prison for social crimes), Jaan Laaman, Carol Manning, Richard Williams, Barbara Curzi, and Pat Gros Levasseur (these last two are both out on parole).

Other North American anti-imperialists were imprisoned for their direct aid to armed clandestine Black organizations in the early 1980s. Judy Clark [seventy-five to life], David Gilbert [seventy-five to life], and Kathy Boudin [twenty-five to life] are serving [virtual] life sentences in prison. They are charged with aiding an attempted expropriation (robbery for political reasons) of an armored truck in New York State in 1981. This action was claimed by the Revolutionary Armed Task Force. Marilyn Buck was also charged as a result of this action, as well as for assisting in the escape of Assata Shakur. Susan Rosenberg and Timothy Blunk were captured in 1984 on charges of conspiracy to possess explosives. Later they, along with Alan Berkman, Laura Whitehorn, Linda Evans, and Marilyn Buck, were charged with a number of bombings claimed by the Armed Resistance Unit and the Red Guerrilla Resistance. Included in these is the 1983 bombing of the Capitol in solidarity with the people of Grenada and in retaliation against the U.S. invasion that year. Other actions were taken against corporate and military targets in solidarity with the peoples of Central America and against intervention, against the Zionist occupation of Palestine, and to protest police killings of Black and Latino people in New York City.

Once again I come to my own background as a former member of the George Jackson Brigade. We were a multi-racial, armed organization that operated in the Northwest in the mid- to late-1970s. We took our name from George Jackson, the Black revolutionary who was assassinated in prison on August 21, 1971. We were composed mainly of working-class ex-convicts, and engaged in acts of armed resistance in solidarity with the struggle of Native people for sovereignty, in support of a strike by Seattle Auto Workers, and in support of struggles by Washington State prisoners for basic human rights. I've already told you that I was in prison for eight-and-a-half years. My comrades, Mark Cook, a Black prisoner [released in 2000], and Ed Mead, a white prisoner [released in 1994], remain in prison to this day for these actions.

There are also anti-authoritarian prisoners. Bill Dunne and Larry Giddings have been in prison since 1979 for participating in expropriations and the liberation of a comrade from jail. Richard Picariello [released in 1995, reimprisoned for alleged parole violations] has been in prison since 1977 for armed actions against U.S. oppression and imperialism. Due to be released after fifteen years, the state is scrambling to extend his sentence because he's dared to continue struggling from inside.

Next, I'd like to talk about those people who consider themselves part of the

Ploughshares. Taking their name from the famous biblical quote about turning swords into ploughshares, these anti-nuclear and anti-military activists come from a religious conviction and tradition that insists that they must not sit by while weapons of destruction are being made and used. Over the last ten years many have entered military bases and destroyed military property directly, while others have borne witness and engaged in symbolic acts. The most recent case is that of Peter Lumsdain and Keith Kjoller, who destroyed the Navstar computer—part of the United States' first strike capability—to the tune of two-and-a-half million dollars. They received eighteen months for this "crime."

Throughout the 1980s, the government also prosecuted members of the sanctuary movement. These include clergy, church workers, and lay activists who have "illegally" provided refuge to Central and South American refugees fleeing U.S.-sponsored repression in their homelands. Following an historic tradition, there are also military resisters. For example, Gilliam Kerley was sentenced to three years in prison plus a \$10,000 fine not merely for refusing to register but because he persisted in organizing against registration and the draft. Military resisters continue to sit in jail as a result of their refusal to serve in the Gulf War. [After hard-fought campaigns, all of the military resisters—or at least those whose cases were publicized—were released by the end of 1994.—E.R.] The U.S. legal system is also used to serve the government's allies in effecting their own counter-insurgency programs. In so doing, it echoes and enforces U.S. foreign policy.

Along with Haitians, Central and South Americans, and other Third World people, there are several European nationals being held in U.S. prisons. Silvia Baraldini, a citizen of Italy, received a forty-year sentence for aiding in the escape of Assata Shakur. Although the Italian government has said that it wants her back in Italy to serve her time in an Italian prison—in accord with the Strasberg Convention—the U.S. Justice Department refused to let her go, claiming the Italians won't be harsh enough.¹ There are also nine alleged members or supporters of the IRA (Irish Republican Army) held in U.S. prisons by the U.S. government.

The same counter-insurgency tactics that have been detailed elsewhere have been used against white political prisoners. These include sophisticated spying and infiltration techniques, the jailing of many white activists for refusing to testify and/or cooperate with grand juries, the use of broad and vague conspiracy laws to criminalize people for association and belief and the use of preventative detention to deny bail. Laura Whitehorn was held without bail for four years before going to trial.

Finally, because they are political prisoners, they get some of the longest sentences in the world. Their political beliefs are used as a basis to impose sentences that are, in many instances, the equivalent of natural life in prison. The reason for this is that they are revolutionaries. For example, in 1986, a man convicted of planning and carrying out bombings—without making warning calls—of ten occupied health clinics where abortions were performed, was sentenced to ten years in prison and was paroled after forty-six months. In contrast, Raymond Levasseur was con-

victed of bombing four unoccupied military targets in protest against U.S. foreign policies, and sentenced to forty-five years in prison. A Ku Klux Klansman, charged with violations of the Neutrality Act and with possessing a boatload of explosives and weapons to be used in an invasion of the Caribbean island of Dominica received eight years.⁴ Yet Linda Evans, convicted of purchasing four weapons with false ID, was sentenced to forty years—the longest sentence ever imposed for this offense.

Prisons are a horrible experience for everyone in this country. This was well documented in the Prison Discipline Study Report, issued in 1991.⁵ This national survey revealed that both physical and psychological abuse, so severe that it approaches the internationally accepted definition for torture, are the norm in maximum-security prisons throughout the United States. That's the case for all prisoners. In this context the North American prisoners—like political prisoners everywhere—are systematically singled out for particularly severe sentences and constant harassment once incarcerated. This includes particular abuse directed at the women and Lesbians, including sexual assault and threats, often at the hands of male guards.

One of the most brutal weapons in the government's arsenal is the control unit prison. Its goal is to reduce prisoners to a state of submission, where it becomes possible to destroy their bodies, their spirit, their will, and ultimately their resistance and very self-definition. While officials claim that these units are only for the most violent disciplinary problems, more and more political prisoners are being placed there solely for their political beliefs. For instance, Alan Berkman, Raymond Levasseur, and Tom Manning were all sent directly to Marion Control Unit after sentencing. Silvia Baraldini and Susan Rosenberg, along with Puerto Rican POW Alejandrina Torres, were sent to the Lexington High Security Unit for two years in 1986. The justification: their political beliefs and associations. Once it was closed, as a result of a massive campaign inside and out, Susan and Silvia were sent to the new control unit for women at Marianna. Marilyn Buck was also sent there directly after sentencing.

In addition to isolation in control units, all political prisoners are more frequently subjected to cruel and inhumane punishment. This includes torture, sexual assault, strip and cavity searches (including those by male guards on women prisoners), punitive transfers, censorship, and denial of medical care, which has had grave consequences in several cases. Alan Berkman, suffering from Hodgkin's disease, nearly died several times while in prison because officials withheld necessary medical treatment. Silvia Baraldini's abdominal lumps, which anyone could feel, were ignored for months only to reveal that she had an aggressive form of uterine cancer. Silvia continues to have difficulty receiving medical attention.

Yet, imprisonment doesn't mean the end of these revolutionaries' organizing and political work. They continue once they're inside. For many of them, this has meant organizing resistance to oppressive prison policies, publishing prison newsletters, providing legal help and assistance, and facilitating courses, work stoppages and hunger strikes. For others it's also meant becoming AIDS activists. In fact, some of

the women are responsible for developing the most comprehensive models (like AIDS Counseling and Education [ACE] at Bedford Hills and Pleasanton AIDS Counseling and Education [PLACE] at FCI-Dublin) for AIDS education and peer counseling in prisons in the country! But even in these cases, political prisoners are punished for being too successful in their work. For instance, Ed Mead, who organized Men Against Sexism at Walla Walla, was prevented from continuing his work on prisoner-on-prisoner rape. Bill Dunne was kept at Marion for years for publishing a newsletter there and David Gilbert was moved from place to place for developing work on AIDS in prison, and finally prevented from doing any work at all. Quite recently, Laura Whitehorn [released in 1999] was transferred from Lexington to Marianna after she participated in the first women's prison uprising in 20 years. Tim Blunk was moved back to Marion from Lewisburg after there was a strike there of Black and Puerto Rican prisoners.

Why does the government so determinedly continue to attack and repress these women and men once they are incarcerated? It needs to break their spirits and prevent them from continuing to educate and mobilize from within the prison walls. On the one hand, these prisoners are used as examples to intimidate whole movements and communities from continuing their resistance. The government wants it made very clear that the price one can pay for being a white person willing to take a stand against this racist and inhuman system is very high. On the other hand, they need these revolutionaries to be buried away and forgotten. We won't let that happen! Clearly now is a time for action. We too can follow the examples of these brave women and men who have given so much of their lives for freedom and justice. We must recognize who and what they are: political prisoners. We must demand their freedom so they can be back on the streets where they belong.

I know I speak for all the white political prisoners when I say that it's been a great honor to be able to speak to you today at this International Tribunal. All of us pledge to continue our resistance to the crimes outlined by today's speakers and commit ourselves to continue to work until there is a world where everyone can have true justice and freedom.

NOTES

Speech delivered at the International Tribunal of Indigenous Peoples and Oppressed Nations in the United States, October 3, 1992; published in E. Rosenblatt, ed. *Criminal Injustice* (Boston: South End, 1991).

1. *Editor's note:* "Davis Hall Alderson" refers to the Control Unit at FCI-Alderson, WV.

2. *Editor's note:* The group Brown calls the "Jonathan Jackson-Sam Melville Brigade" actually called itself the "Sam Melville/Jonathan Jackson Unit," and it operated in the Northeastern United States. This is not the same organization as the Jonathan Jackson-Sam Melville Unit of the New World Liberation Front, which took responsibility for bombings in California in the late 1970s and was affiliated with the Symbionese Liberation Army. Brown

herself was affiliated with the George Jackson Brigade, a group separate from those mentioned in this note.

3. *Editor's note:* The Strasberg Convention on human rights established that prisoners convicted outside their homeland should serve their time in their native country. Baraldini was returned to Italy in August 1999.

4. *Editor's note:* Don Black was no longer in the Klan when he and nine others were arrested preparing to sail to Dominica. He was released from prison after serving "more than two years" (Kent Faulk, "White Supremacist Spreads Views on Net," *Birmingham News*, 19 October 1997, 1). He violated the Neutrality Act, originally passed in 1935 to keep the United States out of a possible European war. The act prevents the exportation of arms, ammunition, and implements of war to any "belligerent" warring nations, defined at the discretion of the president. Amendments to the Neutrality Act in 1936 and 1937 expanded the provisions of the law to exclude loans to states at war and then to include civil wars under foreign wars as well.

5. *Editor's note:* See Prisoners' Rights Union, *Prison Discipline Study* (Sacramento, Calif.: Prisoners' Rights Union, 1991).

Chapter Sixteen

Raymond Luc Levasseur

Raymond Luc Levasseur was born October 10, 1946, into a family of poor French Canadian textile and shoe factory workers in Sanford, Maine. Reluctant to follow his grandparents and parents into the wage slavery of millwork, he went to work in a shoe factory at age seventeen. Resisting the debilitating effects of "speed ups" in production, he and coworkers stopped the machines, jamming them with a shoe—*le sabot*. "It was my first act of sabotage," writes Levasseur, "but a long way from my last."¹

In 1965, he enlisted in the army. Two years later, he was radicalized by a tour of duty in Vietnam. There he witnessed racism against the Vietnamese and African American and Latino American soldiers and found that fighting against the Vietnamese right to self-determination contradicted his own beliefs in American ideals. Returning to the United States when his twelve-month tour ended, Levasseur moved to Tennessee and began college. He also began organizing with the Southern Student Organizing Committee (SSOC), which focused on ending the war and supporting black liberation and the efforts of workers fighting to unionize. Levasseur's activism with SSOC ended in 1969 after he was caught in an undercover police "sting" and was convicted of selling seven dollars' worth of marijuana. Although he had no prior convictions, Levasseur, known for his political activism, received the maximum sentence: five years. He was classified as an "agitator" upon entering prison.

As in most U.S. prisons, the population of Tennessee State Penitentiary was rife with racial tensions, tensions at times promoted and manipulated by guards. Levasseur, however, saw himself as a victim of Anglo-American supremacy and crossed the "color line" of segregated prison life. Consequently, he spent most of the next two years in solitary confinement.² Like many politicized prisoners of the era, Levasseur began studying the revolutionary theories of Mao Zedong, Che Guevara, Frantz Fanon, Rosa Luxemburg, Emma Goldman, and the Black Panther Party.

In 1971, Levasseur was paroled to Maine, where he organized for Vietnam Veter-

ans against the War (VVAW). By 1973, influenced by the Black Panthers and Malcolm X, Levasseur viewed prisoners as key in social justice leadership. He became active in prisoners' rights organizations, including the Statewide Correctional Alliance for Reform (SCAR); there he organized community-based "survival programs" for prison families, including a community bail fund, a prisoners' union, an alternative paper, a martial arts program, and job, housing, and welfare initiatives. Echoing the Black Panthers, SCAR described survival as programs "pending significant social changes, survival pending revolutionary changes that would meet the needs of the people who suffer most from class and racist oppression."³

Organizing in Maine, Levasseur met his future common-law wife, Pat Gros, and Carol Ann and Tom Manning, with whom he would eventually go underground.

In March of 1975, he was arrested in Rhode Island with Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) activist Cameron Bishop, a fugitive on federal sabotage charges. After being released on bail, Levasseur went underground and learned that Pat was expecting the first of their three daughters.

The Levasseurs and their comrades spent the next ten years balancing the demands of family, clandestinity, and frequent moves from state to state, while continuing to organize. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)'s COINTELPRO and the BosLuc task force formed the largest FBI manhunt in history. The task force assembled to find Levasseur and his codefendants brought together elements of various task forces—including the Joint Terrorist Task Force. Federal agents apprehended Ray Luc Levasseur and Pat Gros-Levasseur along with Barbara J. Curzi, Jaan Laaman, and Richard Williams on November 4, 1984, in Ohio. The Mannings were captured five months later in Virginia. All defendants would eventually be known as the "Ohio Seven."

The government alleges that between 1974 and 1984 Levasseur and his comrades were members of the United Freedom Front (UFF) and the Sam Melville/Jonathan Jackson Unit (SM/JJU) (a group not connected with the one cited in Bo Brown's text), named after Sam Melville, a white prison activist killed by guards in the retaking of Attica prison in 1971, and Jonathan Jackson, the slain teenaged brother of George Jackson. These organizations claimed responsibility for a series of bombings of government and military buildings and corporate offices, including those of South African Airlines in New York City. No deaths occurred in any of these actions, but there were injuries in a Suffolk County courthouse bombing.⁴ In 1986, a Federal Court in Brooklyn convicted members of the Ohio Seven of bombings against U.S. military facilities, military contractors, and businesses profiting from South African apartheid. Levasseur received forty-five years. (In a subsequent trial for sedition [in a RICO indictment], Levasseur represented himself and was acquitted, along with his codefendants.)

To serve his forty-five-year sentence, Levasseur was sent to the Control Unit at Marion Prison in Marion, Illinois, a prison that the United Nations has condemned for human rights abuses. Ostensibly, the "prison within a prison" is for the most

violent prisoners, yet Levasseur had accumulated no prison violations. A prison administrator acknowledged that "the purpose of Marion is to control revolutionary attitudes in the prison system and society at large."⁵ The only available work at Marion was in Federal Prison Industries, Inc., or UNICOR, producing military equipment for the Department of Defense. Levasseur's refusal to work for UNICOR likely led to his transfer in 1994 to the Federal Correctional Complex at Florence, Colorado, one of the most high-tech administrative segregation (ADX) units in the United States. In 1999, he was transferred to the Atlanta Federal Prison, and in December of that year, Ray Luc Levasseur was released from solitary confinement for the first time in thirteen years.⁶ Raymond Luc Levasseur's writings appear on the website *Letters from Exile*.⁷

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NOTES

Research and draft for this biography were provided by Daniel Schleifer.

1. Ray Luc Levasseur, "My Blood Is Quebecois," *Letters from Exile*, May 1992, home.earthlink.net/~neoludd/qbq.htm (18 March 2002).
2. Ray Luc Levasseur, "Death Chambers," *Letters from Exile*, home.earthlink.net/~neoludd/chambers.htm (18 March 2002).
3. Ray Luc Levasseur, "Trial Statement," *Letters from Exile*, January 1989 (Opening Statement, 10 January 1989: Springfield, Mass.), home.earthlink.net/~neoludd/statement.htm (18 March 2002).
4. *Editor's note*: According to correspondence with Levasseur in 2002, the only injuries in any SM/JJU/UFF bombing were at the Suffolk County courthouse in Boston where authorities

failed to heed a telephoned SMJJ warning to evacuate the facility. Suffolk was the first SMJJ bombing. No injuries resulted from subsequent bombings.

5. Ray Luc Levasseur, "Dear Betty," *Letters from Exile*, March 1990, home.earthlink.net/~neoludd/betty.htm (18 March 2002).

6. Ray Luc Levasseur, "The REEF," *Letters from Exile*, home.earthlink.net/~neoludd/reef.htm (18 March 2002).

7. *Letters from Exile* is located at home.earthlink.net/~neoludd.

On Trial (Abridged)

January 10, 1989

I freely admit to being part of a revolutionary movement. The government cannot tolerate serious opposition to its own criminal policies, so they do what the prosecution are trying to do here. They want to criminalize my life, my values, and the organisations that they allege I've been part of.

They begin to do this in the indictment by talking about "manner and means." Use of fictitious identification, renting houses with names other than your own, using public telephones to communicate, private mailboxes. The possession of weapons. Practicing with weapons. Monitoring police activities. If you look at the context in which things are done, I think that in this case you are going to find out this is not criminal activity. You know, when I went to Vietnam I was twenty years old, I couldn't vote and I could not have a legal drink. So I did what a lot of other GI's did. I had a fake ID, so I could have a beer and celebrate the idea that I might get killed in another year to defend this system.

More to the point, if you want to stay alive and survive, you have to utilise these methods. In Nazi Germany if they hadn't had secret meetings (I'm talking about Jews, labor leaders, communists, gay people—everybody who the Nazis went after), if they hadn't used false passports, if they didn't carry a gun now and then, do you think more would have gotten killed? When the Nazis spread their fascism into France and you had a French government that collaborated with the Nazis, how far do you think the resistance would have got, if they had not utilised these types of methods? It had a hard enough time as it was.

And the same could be said for South Africa today that murders and tortures its opponents. They want you to carry a pass in South Africa today. So you are going to have to find something else if you don't want to end up in one of those South African prisons. Or the sanctuary movement today, which utilizes churches to move refugees through the country from Central America, refugees from wars that the United States is responsible for creating. Think for a minute about a woman named Harriet Tubman, who used to come through Springfield up to Amherst and into Canada. She carried a gun and she used a name other than her own and she used so-called safe houses. That is what the underground railroad was. How many of those slaves do you think would have made it if she hadn't done that? Part of what they were fleeing from was the Fugitive Slave Act. It was the law at the time.

I would like to digress for a minute and tell you why I'm choosing to defend myself. I was underground for ten years. It's not easy for me to stand here before you now and speak in what is essentially a public forum. What I'm simply trying to do is to add my voice to that of millions of others who cry freedom, from South Africa to Central America to the South Bronx in New York. They don't have much choice about it, and I don't have much choice. I'd rather not be here. But since I

am, I want to defend myself and I want to defend the issues that I think are important. And the important issue here is the issue of human rights. I see that as a central part of this trial.

The prosecutor mentioned one of his snitch witnesses comes from Harvard University, and of course the prosecutor went to the same school. I can tell you that I never went to any prestigious law school. He has indicated that he is going to bring a computer in here to put on his table. You will not see any computer over there on my table. And I don't have a squad of FBI agents running my paperwork around for me. I do all my preparation from a prison cell. I'm one of over a hundred political prisoners in the United States, which the United States refuses to recognize.

The judge has said I don't have to ask questions, I don't have to testify, I don't have to cross-examine. But I do want to defend myself and I do want to participate in certain parts of this trial. What he didn't tell you is that he decides what it is I can do. I have a defense, but you are not necessarily going to hear it or see it. He makes that decision. That's the power he has. But if you don't hear it, it's not that I haven't tried.

You will see me angry in this trial. That anger will never be directed towards you. My anger is reserved for the government and some of the agents and witnesses who they're going to bring in here.

Now, over the years, after Vietnam, I felt I needed to engage in a self-education project. You will see a lot of material that was seized by the FBI. They seized everything in the house, including my kids' report cards, and a copy of the Bill of Rights. I monitored and collected a lot of data, research, fiscal data, articles documenting human rights violations in South Africa, Central America, human rights violations by this government. I collected information on military contractors—who they are selling their weapons to and how much they are getting for it. I tried to document every incident I could find where Black and Latino people were murdered by the police. And if I stood here now and started giving you each one of those names, I would still be standing here next week. I kept a file on the numbers of homeless and hungry and the numbers of unemployed. And there was a special notebook which I kept on prisons, documenting the guard murders of prisoners and, in particular, political prisoners. I documented civil rights violations and violations of international law.

The judge has said that you are triers of facts and I think you should look at the facts. But I'm going to ask you to look for something else. I'm going to ask you to look for the truth. Over the years, directly and indirectly, I have become aware that the United States government and some of the corporations headquartered in this country have been engaged in serious violations of international law, what are referred to as crimes against humanity and war crimes. The government has referred to communiqués that will come into evidence. The evidence is going to show that a lot of these bombings were done in support of freedom in South Africa. And that no other government in today's modern world is as close to being like Nazi Germany as the government of racist South Africa.

South Africa has a system called apartheid. Apartheid means hate Black people; segregate Black people. The United Nations has condemned apartheid as a crime against humanity. The closest ally to racist South Africa in this world is the United States government. The United Nations has condemned the collaboration of the US, including US corporations, with racist South Africa. There's a saying I once heard: "The blood of oppression in South Africa runs as deep as the mines." Because we know who works in the mines in South Africa—who mines the gold and diamonds—Black people. They do it for next to nothing. They do it for starvation wages. Because they've had their land stolen from them. Black people are 80% of the population and they don't even have the right to vote.

There was an action carried out by the Sam Melville/Jonathan Jackson Unit in 1976 against Union Carbide. It was right after the Soweto Uprising in South Africa in which 1,000 or more Black people, mainly women and children, were gunned down by South African troops. It started off as a student demonstration. People demanding to preserve their language and culture were shot in the back by the South African troops. The very first to be killed was Hector Pieterse, a young African boy. He was fourteen years old. Why were they gunned down? Because they were all in the streets of Soweto, a Black township, with their fists in the air shouting "Amandla, Amandla"—power that brings freedom. They want their country back. They want their land back. And they want their rights.

The Sam Melville/Jonathan Jackson Unit attacked the property of the Union Carbide Corporation while the US government was collaborating with the South African police and troops to kill 1,000 Black people. I'm here to support the liberation struggle in South Africa; these prosecutors are here to defend the interests of the United States government in South Africa. The United Freedom Front also paid a visit to the South African Airways office, a front for an office of the South African government in New York City. They did it there after there was a massacre in Lesotho, next to South Africa, where South African troops had gone in and gunned down Black activists. That's called a massacre. We're going to learn in this trial what the word "massacre" means.

American corporations are the legs upon which the racist system in South Africa walks. Troops in South Africa ride in General Motors trucks that are fuelled by Mobil Oil Corporation. So do the entire police and military system. In South Africa, those prisons, that pass system, all of that is computerized by corporations like IBM. The blood of innocent people must stir your conscience. I think that you ought to ask yourself a question throughout this trial, and that is: who are the real criminals? Those who support the racist system in South Africa or those who are opposed to it?

I believe that the evidence will show that there is a war in Central America and that it is a U.S.-sponsored war. This trial's going to have a lot to do with bombings. The United Freedom Front took responsibility for bombings of US military contractors and facilities. The evidence is going to show the UFF objected to the United States shipping bombs and armaments to the government of El Salvador which uses

them to slaughter its own people. One of these particular bombs is a 750 pound fragmentation bomb. The prosecutor referred to 600 pounds of dynamite. This is one bomb that weighs 750 pounds. It's dropped by an A-37 Dragon Jet made by General Electric. That was also used in Vietnam. They're anti-personnel bombs. They explode before they hit the ground. That's not designed to destroy property as much as it's designed to kill people. And while we're standing here, there is a corporation up in Burlington, Vermont—General Electric—that is making machine guns that are going on this aircraft. The guns that the peasants in El Salvador refer to as flying death squads. The issue of state terrorism is going to be a central issue that comes up during this trial.

A lot of SM/JJ bombings were done in support of Puerto Rican independence and the release of Puerto Rican political prisoners. All national struggles in which people are trying to be free are close to my heart, but the struggle for Puerto Rico to be free is especially close to me. I have three young girls and I used to tell them bedtime stories about Puerto Rican patriots like Lolita Lebron and her compañeros who spent a quarter of a century in US prisons because they dared to take the struggle for a free Puerto Rico to the heart of the beast, right here in the United States. Half of the Puerto Rican population have been forced by economic conditions to migrate to this country. The American flag flies over Puerto Rico. While you think it may represent freedom here, it does not represent freedom to the vast majority of Puerto Rican people.

The United States invaded Puerto Rico ninety years ago and it has been militarily occupied since then. There are bases all over the nation of Puerto Rico. The United Nations has ruled that Puerto Rico is a colony of the United States and that colonialism is illegal under international law. I believe that it is inhumane by any standard to subject another country or another people to what you want to do. The United Nations has ruled that Puerto Rico is being held illegally, illegally occupied therefore it has the right to resist that occupation. And I support that. You are going to see evidence in this trial about the police murders of unarmed Puerto Rican men right here in Springfield. That is something the Sam Melville/Jonathan Jackson Unit felt was necessary to respond to. You will see evidence of the abusive treatment of Puerto Rican political prisoners held in the United States.

Like me, you probably hold high value and respect for the principles on which the American Revolution was founded, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. But as I look back at those documents and what they represent, I ask myself, I do not remember anybody conferring on this government or its military or police apparatus the right to engage in violations of human rights in the name of the American people. When I went to school as a kid I would do the pledge of allegiance all the time. But, based on my experience since then, I don't feel like I owe any blind allegiance to a system that is going to perpetuate this kind of suffering of people throughout the world—including here within the United States. I mentioned earlier that the question of killer cops is going to be an important issue in this trial. When officers of the New York City Police Department beat to death a

young Black community artist named Michael Stewart, the United Freedom Front responded by supporting the Black communities in their struggle to stop killer cops.

There's little difference between a lynching by the KKK and a police officer who puts a bullet in the head of a young Black man, and it happens time and time again. And lest we think the Klan is not active, I expect that we're going to have a close look at the New York Police Department during this trial. I think what you are going to see is the largest Ku Klux Klan chapter in the Northeast.

The sedition law and the RICO law were addressed earlier and I now want to address them briefly.¹ Sedition laws in general have always been designed to break what has been a tradition of resistance and political activity in this country, whether it was Native American people resisting the theft of their land or slaves trying to be free, or union leaders or anti-war activists. And this specific sedition law, seditious conspiracy, has been almost exclusively used against Puerto Rican Independentistas, that is, advocates for a free and independent Puerto Rico. Now the government has expanded its use to try and target those who support Puerto Rican independence. You are going to see very clearly that I support Puerto Rican independence with all my heart. And I don't support it idly—I support it actively—I participate in the struggle.

The government wants you to believe that three people are going to conspire to overthrow the most powerful government on the face of the earth. Or eight people as the original indictment says. Or eighty or 800 for that matter. That is a fabrication. That goes against my political thinking. Because I don't think there's going to be significant social change in this country unless a lot of people participate and make it happen. That is what self-determination is all about.

They're spending over \$10,000,000 on this trial to try to convince people that a 125-year sedition statute is going to keep the United States from sinking. What they are really looking for with their \$10,000,000 is a government show trial. A propaganda trial. Sort of a version of what they used to have years ago where you take a dissident and you put him in a wooden stock and try to humiliate him, denigrate him, criminalize him. This is what they want to use the prosecution of myself and others for. As a warning to other political dissidents, to organizers, to revolutionaries. Against those who challenge a government conducting their bloody business as usual.

They want to see to it that I spend the rest of my life in prison. They want to make me bleed. One of the ways they do that is they go not just after me, but they go after everybody with whom I'm associated—friends, family, supporters. I've had friends subpoenaed before a grand jury that refused to testify; refused to give up information. They have been jailed. That's called political internment. Because you're jailed without a trial.

I was arrested in November 1984. Since I've been arrested, I've been beaten and I've been stun-gunned. A stun gun is like an electric cattle prod. I was arrested with my wife and our three children, who were four, six and eight at the time. Government agents attempted to bribe my eight-year-old daughter at the time. She

wouldn't take a bribe. So they put her in a room with FBI agents and state police and they threatened her. There was a time when these agents sitting here and their colleagues were hanging from trees in the cemetery when my grandma died, because they thought that they could pick up on my whereabouts, because they think that my family is going to turn me in. I don't come from that kind of people. We don't turn each other in. We do not turn over for this government.

The treatment of the children at the time of our arrest [and that of] the children of Thomas and Carol Manning, who were grabbed and held for two months incommunicado, separate from their family members who pleaded to have them released—and ultimately they were released after [a hunger strike brought] widespread attention to the case—[reveals] the abuses that the government is prepared to carry out in an attempt to not only convict me and keep me in prison, but also to take that pound of flesh and hurt everybody that I'm associated with.

In June of 1984 it became public knowledge of the existence of a task force called BosLuc. You remember I said my middle name is Luc. Bos, B O S, Boston, Luc, L U C, my middle name. I was the target. This task force existed before June of 1984, but it became public knowledge in June of 1984. It had to because they put a bullet in the head of a kid named Ralph Richards. I read about it in the newspaper. How this kid had his hands up and he got shot in the head by the BosLuc agents. I felt that bullet had my name on it.

There's another reason for this prosecution and what the government is doing that sheds some light on their intent. Not only do they want to keep me in prison, but they want to put my wife in prison. If you listened to the prosecution earlier, you heard them characterize our marriage and our love for each other as if it were some kind of criminal enterprise. You know I'm separated from my three young daughters by prison walls and my wife brings them in to visit me, but the government isn't going to be satisfied until those three kids are orphans. That's the nature and extent of the punishment that they want to put out to anyone who even thinks of challenging this government's policies. . . .

It's hard to believe that those government prosecutors are going to build their careers on the backs of political prisoners and children who are left without their parents. But that's what they're doing. I want to just briefly address the issue of the RICO charges. Racketeering Influenced Corrupt Organizations. I can't tell you how insulted I am that these prosecutors charge me with being a racketeer. That law was passed in the 1970s and it was specifically passed to be used against real gangsters and real racketeers. "Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organizations"—I do not believe has the word revolutionary in it, or political dissident. They're trying to bend the law. . . . You cannot be a revolutionary and be a racketeer. It's a contradiction. It is either one or the other. You cannot support freedom struggles in South Africa or Central America or the Black nation within this country from the foundation of a criminal enterprise. It can't be done. History shows that.

I'm neither profit-oriented nor drug-oriented. In twenty-one years of political activity I've never done anything for personal gain or profit. Nothing. That has

never been part of my motivation or intent. The government wants to charge that bombing the office of the South African government is an act of racketeering? A bombing that was done in response to a massacre in South Africa and to support the struggle for freedom there. This is an act of racketeering? No, it's an expression of support for freedom. It is that simple. If we could have Nelson Mandela here today, or Winnie Mandela, would they think attacking an office of the racist government of South Africa is an act of racketeering?

The government stood up for forty-five minutes essentially saying nothing more than that I'm a criminal and a racketeer and part of a criminal enterprise. That's not true. And I want to refute it and I want to put as much evidence in as I can to refute it. I want to participate in certain parts of this trial to refute it. If you want to see a corrupt and criminal enterprise let's take a good look at the highest levels of the United States government and what some of these military contractors are doing. Then we'll see what real corruption and criminality looks like.

These prosecutors do not represent the American people. They represent the government. And, since Vietnam, I have always made an important distinction between the two. I hope that you will. They're here to present certain interests and I'm here to defend certain issues. I began this by talking about children.² The children I began talking about were my own grandparents. They were merely children when they had to go to work in those mills and shoe factories. My grandfather was thirteen years old. That and my own experience I've outlined to you have left a deep imprint on me. And it does not leave me with any criminal intent or a criminal mind. It leaves me with the heart of a revolutionary, somebody who's committed to social justice.

My wife and I have a marriage. We don't have a criminal enterprise. I love her very much. We have three daughters. My oldest daughter is going to be thirteen day after tomorrow. We named each of our kids after their grandmothers, one of whom is sitting here now, and one after their great grandmother. Because we are proud of our working class roots and we're proud of our families.

I will remember the children of Vietnam, the suffering of those children who I saw there. But I also remember the beauty of their smiles. And I never have lost sight of what human potential there is in people. This is at the heart of what motivates me—my intent, my purpose, my goals, my values, this is where it's at. It's my commitment. This is what the government fears. That I didn't go back to that mill to make those shoe heels, that I took another course with my life. I have a commitment to a future that holds the human potential of poor and working class people as a great asset to be developed. A commitment to a future in which no child will ever have to suffer from racism, poverty or war. A future where justice brings peace for our children and generations to come.

Raymond Luc Levasseur
United States Courthouse
Springfield, MA

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Originally published in the pamphlet *Until All Are Free: The Trial Statement of Ray Luc Levasseur* (London: Attack International, 1989).

Editor's note: This excerpted opening statement was given at Raymond Luc Levasseur's RICO trial—a trial at which he was acquitted of seditious conspiracy and the government dismissed the RICO charges due to a "deadlocked" jury.

1. *Editor's note:* RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act; 18 U.S.C. §§ 1961–1968), officially designed as antiracketeering statutes to combat organized crime, has frequently been used against political dissidents.

2. *Editor's note:* Levasseur is referring to a section of his trial statement not included here.

Chapter Seventeen

Daniel J. Berrigan, S.J.

Born in 1921, Daniel Berrigan joined the Order of Jesus in 1939 and was ordained in 1952. In 1965, church officials exiled the young Jesuit priest indefinitely to South America for comments he made supporting a young Catholic man who immolated himself in protest of the U.S. war against Vietnam. Without a chance to say good-bye to family and friends, Berrigan departed, but after months of considerable petitioning pressure from students and laypeople, the Catholic hierarchy allowed him to return to the United States.

Daniel Berrigan and his younger brother, Philip Berrigan, were two of the most prominent and two of the first Roman Catholic priests to serve federal sentences for acts of political resistance in the United States during the antiwar and civil rights movements. (Philip Berrigan would later leave the priesthood and cofound Plowshares.) Their first sentence was for burning draft cards as members of the Catonsville Nine in 1969.¹ Their two most widely publicized actions were the 1968 Catonsville raid and participation in the Plowshares Eight witness, which entailed hammering nuclear warheads and pouring their blood on government documents in 1980.² Also that year, they traveled to Ireland to highlight the deplorable conditions and punishments endured by some four hundred Irish political prisoners and detainees held by the British.³

While incarcerated, the Berrigan brothers organized in prison, although they were often held incommunicado in solitary confinement and transferred from prison to prison without court orders. On several occasions they led strikes to protest parole boards' "arbitrariness and secrecy" and the Vietnam War.⁴ They challenged abuse and corruption, initiating a strike after discovering that African Americans and ethnic minorities working in "the prison factory for slave wages . . . were making parts of fuses of bombs that were being dropped on Vietnam."⁵

Both Berrigans were heavily influenced by France's radical worker-priest movements, but they were radicalized by Martin Luther King, Jr.'s invitation to clergy to march in Selma, Alabama, in 1965. It was then, according to Berrigan, that the two "young working-class, Irish-American priests . . . stepped out of rhetoric, into

the reality of action, and the realm of consequence."⁶ Berrigan believed it necessary to develop strategies that were consistent with spiritual and political beliefs: "A revolution is interesting insofar as it avoids like the plague, the plague it promised to heal." This led to his criticisms of the Weathermen or the Weather Underground Organization (WUO). In 1969, the group of college-age European Americans emerged from the ranks of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).⁷ In 1970, the Weathermen allegedly planned to detonate a bomb filled with nails at a Reserved Officer Training Corps (ROTC) dance, but while constructing the bomb in New York City's West Village, they accidentally blew up a Manhattan townhouse in which they were working. Three members of the WUO—Teddy Gold, Diana Oughton, and Terry Robbins—were killed in the explosion. By 1976, the Weather Underground had disbanded.⁸

Berrigan was also underground at this time, eluding the FBI, which sought to arrest him for his role in the Catonsville Nine. On August 8, 1970, three days prior to his capture, Berrigan recorded a message to the Weather Underground, cautioning against the use of violence to engineer political revolution: "No principle is worth the sacrifice of a single human being." The WUO, which decided to cease actions with human targets, were receptive to this message.⁹

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NOTES

Research and draft for this biography were provided by Samuel Seidel.

1. The Berrigan brothers and seven others entered a draft board in Catonsville, Maryland,

removed 378 draft files, and burned them in the parking lot. See Daniel Berrigan, *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine* (Boston: Beacon, 1970).

2. The Berrigan brothers and six others entered a General Electric weapons manufacturing plant in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, and damaged missiles. This was the beginning of the Plowshares Movement. The name of the movement came from the book of Isaiah's injunctions to "beat swords into plowshares." Since 1980, there have been over fifty Plowshares actions. See Philip Berrigan with Fred A. Wilcox, *Fighting the Lamb's War: Skirmishes with the American Empire: The Autobiography of Philip Berrigan* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1996), 183–205.

3. Daniel Berrigan, "The Prisoners of Ulster," *New York Times*, 9 October 1980, A35.

4. Berrigan, *Fighting the Lamb's War*, 139.

5. Alan Fox, "A Conversation between Daniel Berrigan and Alan Fox," *Rattle*. www.rattle.com/rattle11/poetry/interview.html (18 March 2002).

6. Berrigan, *Fighting the Lamb's War*, 54 and 62.

7. Harold Jacobs, ed., *Weatherman* (Berkeley, Calif.: Ramparts Press, 1970).

8. Jonathan Lerner, "I Was a Terrorist," *Washington Post*, 24 February 2002.

9. Daniel Berrigan, *Daniel Berrigan: Absurd Convictions, Modest Hopes* (New York: Random House, 1972), 205.

Letter to the Weathermen

1972

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Let me express a deep sense of gratitude that the chance has come to speak to you across the underground. It's a great moment; I rejoice in the fact that we can start a dialogue that I hope will continue through the smoke signals, all with a view to enlarging the circle. Indeed the times demand not that we narrow our method of communication but that we enlarge it, if anything new or better is to emerge. (I'm talking out of a set of rough notes; my idea is that I would discuss these ideas with you and possibly publish them later, by common agreement.)

The cold war alliance between politics, labor, and the military finds many Americans at the big end of the cornucopia. What has not yet risen in them is the question of whose blood is paying for all this, what families elsewhere are being blasted, what separation and agony and death are at the narrow end of our abundance. These connections are hard to make, and very few come on them. Many can hardly imagine that all being right with America means that much must go wrong elsewhere. How do we get such a message across to others? It seems to me that this is one way of putting the very substance of our task trying to keep connections, or to create new ones. It's a most difficult job, and in hours of depression it seems all but impossible to speak to Americans across the military, diplomatic, and economic idiocies. Yet I think we have to carry our reflection further, realizing that the difficulty of our task is the other side of the judgment Americans are constantly making about persons like ourselves. This determination to keep talking with all who seek a rightful place in the world, or all who have not yet awakened to any sense at all of the real world—this, I think, is the revolution. And the United States perversely and negatively knows it, and this is why we are in trouble. And this is why we accept trouble, ostracism, and fear of jail and of death as the normal condition under which decent men and women are called upon to function today.

Undoubtedly, the FBI comes with guns in pursuit of people like me because beyond their personal chagrin and corporate machismo (a kind of debased esprit de corps; they always get their man), there was the threat that the Panthers and the Vietnamese have so valiantly offered. The threat is a very simple one; we are making connections, religious and moral connections, connections with prisoners and Cubans and Vietnamese, and these connections are forbidden under policies which [FBI Director] J. Edgar Hoover is greatly skilled both in enacting and enforcing. They know by now what we are about; they know we are serious. And they are serious about us. Just as, with mortal fear, for the last five years they have known what the Vietnamese are about, and the Brazilians and Angolese and Guatemalans. We are guilty of making connections, we urge others to explore new ways of getting

connected, of getting married, of educating children, of sharing goods and skills, of being religious, of being human, of resisting. We speak for prisoners and exiles and that silent, silent majority which is that of the dead and the unavenged as well as the unborn. And I am guilty of making connections with you.

By and large the public is petrified of you Weather People.¹ There is a great mythology surrounding you—much more than around me. You come through in public as embodiment of the public nightmare, menacing, sinister, senseless, and violent: a spin-off of the public dread of Panthers and Vietcong, of Latins and Africans, of the poor of our country, of all those expendable and cluttering, and clamorous lives, those who have refused to lie down and die on command, to perish at peace with their fate, or to drag out their lives in the world as suppliants and slaves.

But in a sense, of course, your case is more complicated because your rebellion is not the passionate consequence of the stigma of slavery. Yours is a choice. It's one of the few momentous choices in American history. Your no could have been a yes; society realizes this—you had everything going for you. Your lives could have been posh and secure; but you said no. And you said it by attacking the very properties you were supposed to have inherited and expanded—an amazing kind of turnabout.

Society, I think, was traumatized by your existence, which was the consequence of your choice. What to do with Vietcong or Panthers had never been a very complicated matter, after all. They were jailed or shot down or disposed of by the National Guard. But what to do with you—this indeed was one hell of a question. There was no blueprint. And yet this question, too, was not long in finding its answer, as we learned at Kent State.² That is to say, when the choice between property and human life comes up close, the metaphor is once more invariably military. It is lives that go down. And we know now that even if those lives are white and middle-class, they are going to lie in the same gun sights.

The mythology of fear that surrounds you is exactly what the society demands, as it demands more and more mythology, more and more unreality to live by. But it also offers a very special opportunity to break this myth that flourishes on silence and ignorance and has you stereotyped as mindless, indifferent to human life and death, determined to raise hell at any hour or place. We have to deal with this as we go along; but from what values, what mentality, what views of one another and ourselves? Not from a mimicry of insanity or useless rage, but with a new kind of anger which is both useful in communicating and imaginative and slow-burning, to fuel the long haul of our lives.

I'm trying to say that when people look about them for lives to run with and when hopeless people look to others, the gift we can offer is so simple a thing as hope. As they said about Che [Guevara], as they say about Jesus, some people, even to this day; he gave us hope. So my hope is that you see your lives in somewhat this way, which is to say, I hope your lives are about something more than sabotage. I'm certain they are. I hope the sabotage question is tactical and peripheral. I hope indeed that you are uneasy about its meaning and usefulness and that you realize that the burning of properties, whether at Caronsville or Chase Manhattan or any-

where else, by no means guarantees a change of consciousness, the risk always being very great that sabotage will change people for the worse and harden them against enlightenment.³

I hope you see yourselves as Che saw himself, that is to say as teachers of the people, sensitive as we must be to the vast range of human life that awaits liberation, education, consciousness. If I'm learning anything it is that nearly everyone is in need of these gifts—and therefore in need of us, whether or not they realize it. I think of all those we so easily dismiss, whose rage against us is an index of the blank pages of their lives, those to whom no meaning or value have ever been attached by politicians or generals or churches or universities or indeed anyone, those whose sons fight the wars, those who are constantly mortgaged and indebted to the consumer system; and I think also of those closer to ourselves, students who are still enchanted by careerism and selfishness, unaware that the human future must be created out of suffering and loss.

How shall we speak to our people, to the people everywhere? We must never refuse, in spite of their refusal of us, to call them our brothers. I must say to you as simply as I know how; if the people are not the main issue, there simply is no main issue and you and I are fooling ourselves, and American fear and dread of change have only transferred themselves to a new setting.

Thus, I think a sensible, humane movement operates on several levels at once if it is to get anywhere. So it says communication, yes; organizing, yes; community, yes; sabotage, yes—as a tool. That is the conviction that took us where we went, to Catonsville. And it took us beyond, to this night. We reasoned that the purpose of our act could not be simply to impede the war, or much less to stop the war in its tracks. God help us; if that had been our intention, we were fools before the fact and doubly fools after it, for in fact the war went on. Still, we undertook sabotage long before any of you. It might be worthwhile reflecting on our reasons why. We were trying first of all to say something about the pernicious effect of certain properties on the lives of those who guarded them or died in consequence of them. And we were determined to talk to as many people as possible and as long as possible afterward, to interpret, to write, and through our conduct, through our appeal, through questioning ourselves again and again to discuss where we were, where we were going, where people might follow.

My hope is that affection and compassion and nonviolence are now common resources once more and that we can proceed on one assumption, the assumption that the quality of life within our communities is exactly what we have to offer. I think a mistake in [the Students for a Democratic Society] SDS's past was to kick out any evidence of this community sense as weakening, reactionary, counter-productive. Against this it must be said that the mark of inhumane treatment of humans is a mark that also hovers over us. And it is the mark of a beast, whether its insignia is the military or the movement.

No principle is worth the sacrifice of a single human being. That's a very hard statement. At various stages of the movement some have acted as if almost the

opposite were true. As people got purer and purer, more and more people have been kicked out for less and less reason. At one remote period of the past, the results of such thinking were the religious wars, or wars of extinction. At another time it was Hitler; he wanted a ton of purity too. Another is still with us in the war against the Panthers and the Vietnamese. I think I'm in the underground because I want part in none of this inhumanity, whatever name it goes by, whatever rhetoric it justifies itself with.

When madness is the acceptable public state of mind, we're all in danger; for madness is an infection in the air. And I submit that we all breathe the infection and that the movement has at times been sickened by it too.

The madness has to do with the disposition of human conflict by forms of violence. In or out of the military, in or out of the movement, it seems to me that we had best call things by their name, and the name for this thing, it seems to me, is the death game, no matter where it appears. And as for myself, I would as soon be under the heel of former masters as under the heel of new ones.

Some of your actions are going to involve inciting conflict and trashing, and these actions are very difficult for thoughtful people. But I came upon a rule of thumb somewhere which might be of some help to us: Do only that which one cannot not do. Maybe it isn't very helpful, and of course it's going to be applied differently by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and an underground group of sane men and women. In the former, hypocritical expressions of sympathy will always be sown along the path of the latest rampage. Such grief is like that of a mortician in a year of plague. But our realization is that a movement has historic meaning only insofar as it puts itself on the side of human dignity and the protection of life, even of the lives most unworthy of such respect. A revolution is interesting insofar as it avoids like the plague the plague it promised to heal. Ultimately if we want to define the plague as death (a good definition), a prohuman movement will neither put people to death nor fill the prisons nor inhibit freedoms nor brainwash nor torture enemies nor be mendacious nor exploit women, children, Blacks, or the poor. It will have a certain respect for the power of the truth, a power which created the revolution in the first place.

We may take it, I think, as a simple rule of thumb that the revolution will be no better and no more truthful and no more populist and no more attractive than those who brought it into being. Which is to say, we are not killers, as America would stigmatize us, and indeed *as America perversely longs for us to be*. We are something far different. We are teachers of the people who have come on a new vision of things. We struggle to embody that vision day after day, to make it a reality among those we live with, so that people are literally disarmed by knowing us; so that their fear of change, their dread of life are exorcised, and their dread of human differences slowly expunged.

Instead of thinking of the underground as temporary, exotic, abnormal, perhaps we should start thinking of its implication as an entirely self-sufficient, mobile, internal revival community; the underground as a definition of our future. What

does it mean, literally, to have nowhere to go in America, to be kicked out of America? It must mean—let us go somewhere in America, let us stay here and play here and love here and build here, and in this way join not only those who like us are kicked out also, but those who have never been inside at all, the Blacks and the Puerto Ricans and the Chicanos.

Next, we are to strive to become such men and women as may, in a new world, be nonviolent. If there's any definition of the new man and woman, the man or woman of the future, it seems to me that they are persons who do violence unwillingly, by exceptions. They know that destruction of property is only a means; they keep the end as vivid and urgent and as alive as the means, so that the means are judged in every instance by their relation to the ends. Violence as legitimate means: I have a great fear of American violence, not only in the military and diplomacy, in economics, in industry and advertising; but also in here, in me, up close, among us.

On the other hand, I must say, I have very little fear, from firsthand experience, of the violence of the Vietcong or Panthers (I hesitate to use the word violence), for their acts come from the proximate threat of extinction, from being invariably put on the line of self-defense. But the same cannot be said of us and our history. We stand outside the culture of these others, no matter what admiration or fraternity we feel with them; we are unlike them, we have other demons to battle.

But the history of the movement, in the last years, it seems to me, shows how constantly and easily we are seduced by violence, not only as method but as an end in itself. Very little new politics, very little ethics, very little direction, and only a minimum moral sense, if any at all. Indeed one might conclude in despair: the movement is debased beyond recognition, I can't be a part of it. Far from giving birth to the new man, it has only proliferated the armed, bellicose, and inflated spirit of the army, the plantation, the corporation, the diplomat.

Yet it seems to me good, in public as well as in our own house, to turn the question of violence back on its true creators and purveyors, working as we must from a very different ethos and for very different ends. I remember being on a television program recently and having the question of violence thrown at me, and responding—look, ask the question in the seats of power, don't ask me. Don't ask me why I broke the law; ask [Richard] Nixon why he breaks the law constantly; ask the Justice Department; ask the racists. Obviously, but for [Presidents Lyndon] Johnson and [Richard] Nixon and their fetching ways, Catonsville would never have taken place and you and I would not be where we are today; just as but for the same people SDS would never have grown into the Weather People or the Weather People have gone underground. In a decent society, functioning on behalf of its people, all of us would be doing the things that decent people do for one another. That we are forbidden to act, forced to meet so secretly and with so few, is a tragedy we must live with. We have been forbidden a future by the forms of power, which include death as the ordinary social method; we have rejected the future they drafted us into, hav-

ing refused, on the other hand, to be kicked out of America, either by aping their methods or leaving the country.

The question now is what can we create. I feel at your side across the miles, and I hope that sometime, sometime in this mad world, in this mad time, it will be possible for us to sit down face to face, brother to brother, brother to sister, and find that our hopes and our sweat, and the hopes and sweat and death and tears and blood of our brothers and sisters throughout the world, have brought to birth that for which we began.

Shalom to you.

NOTES

On August 8, 1970, Daniel Berrigan recorded a message to the Weather Underground; the transcribed tape became the "Letter to the Weathermen"; it was published in 1971, in *The Village Voice*, and reprinted in 1972, in Berrigan's *America Is Hard to Find* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972).

1. *Editor's note:* The "Weather People," also known as the Weatherman, the Weathermen, or the Weather Underground Organization, was an underground offshoot of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).

2. *Editor's note:* Four whites, including students, were shot during a demonstration protesting the Vietnam War at Kent State University in Ohio on May 4, 1970.

3. *Editor's note:* The Berrigans burned draft records at Catonsville on May 17, 1968. "Chase Manhattan" refers to an action in the 1980s in which Daniel Berrigan and a group of theology students sat on the steps of Chase Manhattan Bank in protest of the bank's investments in apartheid South Africa.

Chapter Eighteen

Michele Naar-Obed

Michele Naar-Obed was born May 29, 1956, in Ossining, N.Y. She began her involvement in peace and social justice activism in 1991, in the context of a growing U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia. At the time she was living in Baltimore, Maryland, and working as a pathologist's assistant in a community hospital. In reaction to the impending Gulf War, she became involved with Quaker peace activism in Baltimore, and committed her first act of civil disobedience the day after the bombing of Iraq began in January 1991. Naar-Obed and six others climbed on the roof of a National Guard armory and poured oil, sand, and their blood on the building's sign. All of the activists involved were charged with trespassing and destruction of government property. By the time they went to trial, the ground war had ended and sanctions were devastating Iraq (in a decade U.S. economic sanctions would lead to over a million civilian deaths). Rather than try to legally maneuver out of a prison sentence, Naar-Obed chose a stance based on political convictions. Nevertheless, she and her codefendants were acquitted on a legal technicality. She describes that first act of civil disobedience and the resulting trial as catalysts in her ideological and spiritual development: "I started to see that being a peace activist demanded more than reaction to an event. It's about saying no to, and resisting, what is morally wrong as well as saying yes to, and living, what is right. It has since become my full time and, hopefully, life-long commitment."

Following her first trial, Naar-Obed continued in direct-action peace work, grounding her civil disobedience in spiritual and religious commitments: "[F]or me, this work needs to be grounded in faith and with the belief that God or some Divine Source exists. . . . Living a life of resistance to the violence of militarism in one of the most militarized nations in the world makes the most sense to me when I understand the significance of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. That, too, is a life-long pursuit."

The Plowshares movement, of which Naar-Obed is an active member, began in 1980 when then Catholic priests Daniel and Philip Berrigan and six others hammered and poured blood on two nose cones for nuclear warheads at a General Elec-

tric plant. Since this first act, there have been more than fifty Plowshares disarmament actions. Naar-Obed describes the Plowshares movement as an "effort to bring to life Isaiah's prophecy, 'They shall beat their swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not wage war against nation nor shall they study war any more.'"¹ In May 1996, Naar-Obed was a defendant in the Jubilee Plowshares East trial, for her involvement in an August 7, 1995, act of civil disobedience in which she and three others symbolically disarmed a fast attack nuclear submarine at the Newport News, Virginia, shipyards, while on the same day two of their friends symbolically disarmed a Trident nuclear missile on the West Coast. For her role in this act of civil disobedience, Naar-Obed was imprisoned for eighteen months. As a condition of her parole, she was prohibited from visiting the Jonah House, a Christian Resistance community in Baltimore founded by Philip Berrigan and other peace activists in 1973, where she had lived with her husband and daughter for years.

In addition to her two trials for Plowshares actions, Naar-Obed has been tried in numerous smaller trials. For her nonviolent political activism, she has been sentenced to prison and jail terms on several occasions.

Author of a collection of essays, *Maternal Convictions*, on community, spirituality, and nonviolent resistance (abridged version of which appears below) and numerous articles for *Year One* and various Catholic Worker newsletters, Michele Naar-Obed currently lives with her husband, Greg Boertje-Obed, and their daughter, Rachel, at the Loaves and Fishes Catholic Worker Community in Duluth, Minnesota, and continues to write, speak, and act on behalf of peace and in opposition to U.S. militarism.

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NOTES

Research and draft for this biography were provided by Elizabeth Walsh.

1. Michele Naar-Obed, *Maternal Convictions: A Mother Beats a Missile into a Plowshare* (Maple, Wisc.: Laurentian Shield Resources for Nonviolence, 1998), 7.
2. *Maternal Convictions*, 7–8.
3. *Maternal Convictions*, 5.

Maternal Convictions: A Mother Beats a Missile into a Plowshare (Abridged)

SPIRITUAL OPPRESSION

We are the only nation in the world that has ever dropped a nuclear weapon on human beings. We have spent more than \$12 trillion for war and war preparations since 1945. Approximately \$6 trillion of that has been spent on nuclear weapons. Our annual military budget is larger than the GNP of eight industrialized nations combined.

Why do so many people bury their heads in the sand with the help of mind-numbing television, drugs, alcohol and material consumption while our societal net unravels? Our cities are dying, the quality of public education is rapidly declining, health care is abysmal, the number of families living below the poverty line is ever-increasing, and this nation incarcerates more people per capita than any other industrialized nation in the world.

Life-sustaining and community-enhancing resources are decreasing exponentially. A country which is still viewed by most of the world as the richest and strongest is dependent on two death-dealing industries which dominate: weapons production and sales, and the prison industry.

Our air and water are polluted, our food is contaminated, and cancer has reached epidemic proportions. While most people point their finger at Joe Camel and the evil tobacco industry, there is a large body of evidence to condemn nuclear fallout from both weapons tests and accidents for much of the increase in lung cancer, according to the Worldwatch Institute and many other independent researchers and analysts. In September 1997 the National Cancer Institute released a study attributing 75,000 American citizen cancer cases to U.S. above ground nuclear testing in the 1950s and 1960s. According to the U.S. government itself—[Environmental Protection Agency] EPA and [Government Accounting Office] GAO reports in particular—the U.S. military is largely responsible for the pollution and devastation of our natural environment. They are virtually held unaccountable by the standard checks and balances and governmental regulations. Even when successfully sued by the states for violations of national environmental law, the Pentagon is able to overturn all challenges in the appellate courts. They are essentially lawless.

To underscore that phenomenon, Americans recently learned that during the 1950s our own military conducted secret medical experiments with radioactive material to understand the effects of nuclear weapons on human beings. Experiments were carried out on poor, pregnant mothers to study the effect of radioactivity on the fetus, on the mentally impaired, and on prisoners. Soldiers were sent to

explosion sites as human guinea pigs—no more than test animals—to study the effects of nuclear fallout at varying distances from ground zero.

This was revealed by Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary [in the Clinton Administration] somewhat after the time of the Iraq massacre, when Americans were notified that Saddam Hussein had gassed the Kurds. Neither behavior is excusable; *wake up, America! Something just as evil and criminal happened right here to us.*

Some of us from the Atlantic Life Community handed out informational leaflets about these nuclear experiments. Expecting the response to be outrage at the government and possibly a willingness to stand with us, we found instead that a common response was to tear the leaflet into pieces and throw it in our faces. Even that was actually a little more tolerable than watching people toss the leaflet aside as they might a candy bar wrapper. At least the first response showed emotion.

This made me realize how difficult it is to change hearts and minds about our military policies that victimize people on the other side of the world when most people don't seem to care about what's happening right here to their sons and daughters, sisters and brothers, and mothers and fathers.

I heard a Palestinian man speak about a group of people seeking to nonviolently resist Israeli occupation of their land. He challenged his fellow Palestinians to find 300 people who would literally be willing to give their lives to resist the oppressive occupation nonviolently. Within days 300 people came forward and they began a series of nonviolent actions to reclaim their land.

A young man from South Africa told of how university students would give up their education to join resistance groups during apartheid. Central Americans formed faith-based communities that are an envy to many of us North Americans.

These people were willing to give up their individual desires and even their lives for the communal good. They make sacrifices that most of us don't even dare to think about. Hearing these stories, I wonder why in our country it's often so difficult to get more than a handful of people to come to a vigil or even think about risking arrest.

One reason that comes to mind is that our oppression is much more subtle and insidious. It is more spiritual than physical in nature. Our oppressors work by taking over our hearts and minds rather than our "homelands." They work on stripping us of everything we know to be human and decent and loving. They fill us with images to make us afraid and to make us feel meaningless unless we have certain things. They work on making us believe that bombs are peacemakers and plowshares activists are violent. The idea of a know-nothing Generation X is marketed to become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Even with the billion-dollar Wall Street goods-and-political-services propaganda ad machine, many Americans are beginning to realize that the American Dream is a lie. They are grasping that the void cannot be filled with materialism, consumerism or arrogant superiority.

Our souls yearn for community. It's natural to love and trust. It is not natural to

kill, and it is not natural for a nation to be so obsessed with killing. We want community with each other and with our natural environment.

For most people, this spiritual discomfort has become a little more noticeable. For others, it has become unbearable. Jesus' warning now makes sense. Don't be afraid of those who can harm your body and do no more. Fear instead the one who can kill both body and soul and cast your soul into damnation (Luke 11: 4-5).

How do we resist this spiritual occupation? Where do we turn for guidance and example? How do we differentiate between truth and lies? Can we overcome our fears and misconceptions and come together as sisters and brothers? Can we go beyond our own self-interests and act as if we had the best interest of the next seven generations in mind? These are just some of the questions we must address if we have any hope of preserving our identity, our existence, and more importantly, our very souls.

THE PLOWSHARES WITNESS

There are numerous books written on the subject of the plowshare witness. The most complete, *Swords into Plowshares*, by Sr. Anne Montgomery and Art Laffin, gives an analysis and summary of every plowshare action up to 1996 and is an excellent resource, especially for anyone interested in direct disarmament.¹

The plowshare witness is an attempt to bring Isaiah's vision (Isaiah 2:4) to life.² It envisions a time when all of God's people come together on the Holy Mountain to live as sisters and brothers. They come disarmed, personally and communally. It is a time when enemies put aside their differences and live together as described in the Peaceable Kingdom (Isaiah 11:6-9).

If we believe that the word of God applies to every generation throughout all of time, then we, this current generation of God's children, are called to bring the Word to life. This effort won't make sense to one who believes that the prophecies died with the prophets, or that our social responsibilities ended with Christ's crucifixion. It also won't make sense to one who believes in a final apocalyptic event resulting in the second coming of Christ to collect "the saved."

It will only make sense if one believes that we are required to live out God's commandments and God's vision, not only in our personal lives, but in our professional, communal, national, and international lives as well. It will make sense if we believe we have the responsibility to live out God's kingdom on earth: "*thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*" It will make more sense if we believe that it is the Christian responsibility to follow the nonviolent examples of Jesus as recorded in the Sermon on the Mount. It will only become palatable if one believes that the resurrection of the spirit through the Divine power of God is greater than persecution and that God has the final word even over death.

The plowshares witness is an act of direct disarmament, but the means are, in reality, symbolic. We who choose this witness beat the swords of our time, but we

do this with small household hammers intending to convert, not destroy. We often spend months together in preparation and in prayer so that we can carry forth this action, not with malice or hate, but filled with hope and love for God's Creation. Thus our hammering is minimal and meant to be a symbolic attempt to begin the process of conversion.

Another symbol commonly used in plowshares witnesses is blood. The blood is often our own and is clinically drawn by a medical professional. It is poured out on the weapon to expose its destructive nature. During a time when weapons are becoming more high-tech, when soldiers can push buttons to destroy people thousands of miles away without having to see, hear, or smell death, and when the victims are referred to as "collateral damage," the pouring out of our blood is an attempt to make visible the bloody reality of war.

On a spiritual level, the blood also represents the blood of Christ. It is the blood of the new covenant, which requires love of enemy, forgiveness, and compassion.

Generally, plowshare witnesses are carried out on weapons that are nuclear-capable. These weapons not only violate God's law, but international law as well. The use, or threatened use, of weapons that cannot discriminate between soldier and civilian and are capable of mass destruction is illegal even under our own Constitution. Additionally, our Constitution states that international law supersedes local, state and federal law. So we have not only a moral right, but a legal right to use nonviolent direct action to stop the threat of criminal activity inherent in the manufacture of these weapons.

Another component of the plowshare witness is to stay with and take responsibility for the action after it's completed. This often means that we have to search out authorities to explain our act, and we attempt to indict them for participating in criminal activity under international law. We make no attempt to run or hide from our witness. To do so would reduce it to an act of vandalism.

Generally speaking, our indictments against the government and weapons manufacturers are ignored and we are the ones who are indicted, charged, and almost always convicted. The most common charges are trespass and destruction of government property, although some vindictive prosecutors have charged folks with sabotage.

The government has become very adept at silencing us in court. They have routinely invoked an "in limine"³ motion preventing us from even using the words "international law" or "my religious beliefs" in our defense. In essence, the motion makes it impossible to speak about our moral, religious or political motivations without being further charged with contempt of court. Prosecution of the action is reduced to: Were you there? Did you intend to hit the weapon with the hammer? If so, you are guilty of trespass and destruction of property. If it wasn't such a flagrant display of injustice, it would be almost comical. Actually, in spite of it all, it is sometimes laughable.

Jail is almost inevitable, although there have been some judges who have shown their support in the sentencing phase, giving short or no jail terms at all. On the

average, prison sentences range from one to three years. None of us seek imprisonment, but we accept it as a consequence. Some accept it more joyfully than others. The jail witness often becomes a focal point and a reminder. Most Americans have notoriously short attention spans and the person in jail tends to nudge our consciences and challenge us with questions that would be easier left unanswered and forgotten.

Is symbolic direct disarmament a violent action? That's a question that has caused divisions even amongst the radical Catholics who agree with the practice of civil disobedience.

The standard Webster dictionary gives the definition of violence as "*the exertion of a physical force so as to injure or abuse.*" Although this is a narrow definition, at least part of the answer lies in the issue of intent. Individually and communally, the intent of the plowshare witness is to symbolically convert. We don't use major wrecking devices and we don't go with hopes of doing as much damage as possible before being caught. We often are in a position to stop acting when we feel the symbols have been brought to life and then to search out authorities to explain the symbolism of our work.

Is it possible to do violence to property that has no right, morally or legally, to exist? For property to be recognized as such means that it has a proper and life-enhancing role for the good of society and creation. The weapons we choose to act on are primarily first strike, nuclear-capable weapons which, if used, can destroy all Creation as well as prohibit the normal reproduction of life for generations to come, if not destroy it altogether. By their very existence, they endanger and intimidate and hold the entire world hostage, creating an immoral ethic of might makes right. Their illegality reduces them to dangerous contraband which would, under all other circumstances, be disassembled or destroyed.

Governments appear to be unwilling or incapable of making any honest efforts toward real disarmament. Politicians are stuck in the muck and mire of greed and power. Assuming that decisions in a democracy are made by "we the people," then "we the people" are trying to bring the issues of disarmament to debate through the plowshare witness.

Contrary to government belief, there is no plowshare organization. Individuals moved by their consciences come together to pray and discern. Out of that prayer and reflection, an action plan may go forward. The first plowshares witness occurred in 1980. Since then, there have been sixty worldwide.

GOOD NEWS PLOWSHARES

I have participated in two of them [Plowshares acts]. The first, which we called the Good News Plowshares, took place on April 7, 1993, Good Friday. Kathy Boylan, Greg Boertje-Obed and I had spent many months in preparation together. Greg and I were married just three weeks before the action.

Our witness took place at the Newport News shipyard in Virginia. One of the largest shipyards on the East Coast, the majority of its contract work is for the military. Through public record, we were able to find out that it had contracts for aircraft carriers and fast attack nuclear submarines.

Our hope was to locate the fast attacks, which we learned would house twelve vertical launch cruise missiles that could be either nuclear or conventionally tipped. One cruise missile is capable of causing seventeen times the damage done to Hiroshima. Twelve missiles would cause 204 times more damage. We were able to verify that fast attack subs have a role in a first strike scenario and are considered to be a violation of international law.

At approximately 3 a.m., with blood, hammers, banners, and indictments in hand, we cut a hole in the chain link fence, slid down an embankment and made our way through the massive shipyard. We had no idea where we were going and were counting on the Spirit to guide us.

Time seemed distorted, like in a dream, but at some point before dawn, we literally ran into a submarine on dry dock. It was surrounded by scaffolding and the top, which is where we needed to go in order to hammer on the launching tubes for the cruise missiles, was about sixty-eighty feet up.

I'm not too fond of heights; once we reached a height of about twenty feet, I was ready to pour the blood, hit the massive hull with the hammer a few times, tie our banner to the scaffolding, and wait for a crane to get us down. Kathy and Greg kept climbing and, finally, so did I. When we reached the top, we saw a makeshift canvas tent. There, inside, were the launching tubes with their massive steel hatch covers open.

We poured our blood into the tubes, found a hunk of metal that appeared to line the inner part of the tube, removed it and hammered on the lip of the tube. We spray painted "*Christ Lives—disarm,*" "*Love,*" and "*Christ's cross.*" We hung up banners and sat together in prayer. We then introduced ourselves to some nearby workers, assured them we were acting nonviolently, and suggested they find a security officer.

During the actual witness, I felt as if I were in an altered state of mind. It was almost like watching another force use my body to carry out the act. I was in it but not in it. Once we broke that state of mind, the reality of being eighty feet up hit, and I could not imagine going down all that scaffolding. When we were finally escorted down, we learned that the other side of the sub had a sturdy and wide stairwell with hand railing set up against it. What a relief!

After many hours of interrogation by shipyard security and Navy investigators, we were brought before a magistrate and then to the city jail.

We had previously decided that we would not pay a bond to be released before trial and we would represent ourselves in court. Our testimony would be simple and spoken from the heart. It would be close to five months before we were finished with two trials; one for the misdemeanor trespass charge for which we were fined

\$100, and the second for the felony destruction of property charge for which we received an eight-month sentence.

With the time already spent in jail and calculated good time, we had already completed our sentence. In essence, we were tried, convicted, sentenced and released all in one day. The witness was complete.

JUBILEE PLOWSHARES WITNESS

The second plowshare witness was a bit more complicated and as of this writing, I am still living through the consequences. This witness took place August 7, 1995, the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Our daughter Rachel was ten months old. The Jonah House community was ready and willing to support Greg and help raise her. But leaving her was a gut-wrenching decision for me.

Our group was divided into East and West Coast components, and we called ourselves the Jubilee Plowshares East and West. Our name was to symbolize the Year Jubilee, which, biblically, was the year when debts would be forgiven and the poor would be liberated. Our hope was to be liberated from the threat and debt of nuclear weapons.

The West Coast group was able to enter a Lockheed-Martin plant and make their way into a room where casings for the D5 Trident nuclear missiles were made. They hammered on the casings and poured blood on classified documents, were arrested, and remained in jail while awaiting trial. They were charged by the federal government with destruction of property, then convicted and sentenced to ten months in prison plus two years of supervised release (probation). They refused to cooperate with the conditions of supervised release, and both participated in another, the Prince of Peace, plowshares at a shipyard in Maine [and received] prison sentences for that action.

Our East Coast group made its way, once again, into the Newport News shipyard, walking by numerous security guards and checkpoints, as if we were invisible. This time we walked down a dock where three fast attack submarines were located. We got on board one that had the launching tubes installed and the hatches open. Again we hammered, poured blood, hung up banners and prayed. After a while, we were able to get the attention of a worker and to suggest that he inform security.

We were originally charged by the state but those charges were eventually dropped in lieu of federal government prosecution. The shipyard CEOs were highly embarrassed and livid that an ordinary group of people could get into a high security area undetected once again. They wanted to be certain that prosecution would be hard and heavy.

Two members of our group experienced personal crises while in jail. We all bonded out to regroup and support each other. Amy eventually plea-bargained with the state, while Rick, Erin, and I faced federal charges which included three counts

of sabotage, destruction of property and conspiracy. We were facing a maximum of forty-five years in prison and \$1.5 million in fines!

After much discussion, we decided to put on a serious legal defense and six lawyers (more of them than us) volunteered their services. They researched cases and worked up a string of motions in order to ensure that we would not be gagged by an *in limine* motion. We had expert witnesses prepared to testify about international law vis-à-vis the first strike capability of the fast attack submarine. We had Catholic bishops willing to testify that we were motivated by our faith and understanding of the Scriptures. We had people willing to fast and pray outside the courthouse for the duration of the trial and we had a sympathy reporter willing to do daily feature articles.

Following months of preparation, we went to our preliminary hearing where the motions to set the format of the trial would be heard. Twenty-one motions were presented by our lawyers and twenty-one motions were denied by Judge Rebecca Smith. There would be no expert witness testimony and we would not be allowed to talk about our religious, political or moral views, or mention the words international law. Grounds for a conviction of sabotage were reduced down to: did we intend to hit the metal with the hammer? If so, we had therefore intended to prevent the U.S. from defending itself in the event of war. It was an absurd judgment and even the prosecutor was shocked. He immediately offered to drop all charges if we pled guilty to one count of conspiracy to damage government property.

Rick, Erin and I spent four days together in prayer and discernment. We were physically, emotionally and spiritually tired. Our choices were to go ahead with a kangaroo court trial, face inevitable convictions on all five counts, and hope that we could win an appeal, or accept the plea bargain. We chose the latter. Erin, Rick and I were sentenced to eight, nine and eighteen months in prison, respectively. Four of Erin's eight months would be spent on home confinement. Additionally, we were given fines and restitution and three years of supervised release (some of the conditions of supervised release are detailed in the essay on community).

Accepting the plea bargain was an incredibly hard decision to make and one for which I still have not forgiven myself. I began the process of preparing for the witness while I was pregnant with Rachel. The witness was to be my gift to her and to all the children of the world. When we did the action, it was like giving birth all over again. It was an act that made the hope and promise of a better tomorrow alive.

The witness took on a life of its own and I believed it was my responsibility to nurture it, defend it, and keep it alive while the powers that be wanted to destroy it. When I accepted that plea bargain, I felt as if I were turning my back on it. I let it down. I no longer had the strength to defend it. With much remorse, I let it go with the hope that its life would be picked up and nourished by God and by others stronger than me. Maybe that's how the family of Moses felt when they floated him down the Nile in a basket.

The criticism of my decision to plea bargain is self-imposed. My community, and

friends from the larger worldwide disarmament community, supported it. Nobody, to my knowledge, condemned us. The significance of the witness was not changed or diminished by accepting the plea. However, it still remains a decision that I will have to come to terms with. I continue to learn from it, and, in the process, grow deeper in faith.

ON COMMUNITY

People live in a growing state of fear of neighbor, both domestic and abroad. Fear and isolation seem to work in a sick symbiosis. The more one fears, the more one isolates, and the more one isolates, the more one fears. This twisted psychological development makes it very easy for the government to demonize and dehumanize people. Every young black male becomes suspect, foreigners become likely terrorists, poor people become lazy welfare trash, and on and on.

Thus, the significance and benefits of living communally grow more and more profound. It's an experience in which one constantly learns about human interaction and group dynamics.

We discern and pray together as a community and in the context of our faith. Our willingness to trust one another is essential to our existence.

I became especially aware of that during my last prison term. Rachel was essentially raised by Greg and other community members while I completed the Jubilee witness prison term. They were willing, and I had to let them, make the day-to-day decisions about her life. I had to trust that they would love her and discipline her when necessary. I had to trust in the values they would instill in her. She was twenty-three months old when I left for prison and had just turned three when I was released. I was away during one of the most formative years of her life.

Rachel thrived during my absence. She was given much love, and she in turn enriched the lives of those around her. Through this experience, she learned that her family goes beyond the bloodline. It will, we hope, help her to realize that she is part of a much larger family, the human family, and that all people are her brothers and sisters. Understanding this, being able to connect and identify with the human family, makes it harder to kill or allow a government to kill in our names.

Jonah House is part of an extended community which includes many of the Catholic Worker (CW) communities, though Jonah House itself is not a CW home. These communities differ from Jonah House in that a large part of the CW vision includes hospitality or direct service to the poor, and the majority of worker houses are funded by donation. The CW communities are much more experienced in breaking down the barriers of class and race through their efforts to live communally and equally with the poor.

Together, our communities make up, in the eastern states, a loose-knit larger group known as the Atlantic Life Community (ALC). The ALC meets twice each year to share and reflect together, strengthen our bonds, and deepen our commit-

ments to peace and justice. We also try to meet at least once during the year to participate in a public witness denouncing violence.

Similarly, CWs and peace communities in the Southeast, Midwest, and West Coast gather periodically in work and support; there are also attempts to form community internationally.

We seem to be coming into a time for community awareness of our interdependence on each other. While each may always be autonomous in deciding how to live the vision of peace and justice, we cannot look at ourselves as separate entities. There is great strength in our unity; at a time when the government seems to be more oppressive and intolerant of dissent, that strength is imperative.

As I write this, I am forbidden by the federal courts to return to my home with the Jonah House community.⁴ This is a condition of supervised release (probation) which will last for three years as a result of my participation in the Jubilee Plowshare witness. This is also a clear example of the government's attempt to break up community, knowing that resistance is virtually impossible without it.

Upon release from federal prison, I was forced to live in Norfolk, VA to meet probation requirements. In order for our family to be together, Greg and Rachel had to relocate from Jonah House to Norfolk. It was a painful separation for everyone, especially Rachel. In addition to keeping her from those she loved, she had to be taken out of her Headstart program that she enjoyed very much. While the officials in the government may think they are hurting me, it was my daughter who took the brunt of this spiteful tactic. Senator Barbara Mikulski [D-Maryland], Catholic bishops and hundreds of friends wrote the probation department requesting that I be able to return home, to no avail.

In addition to being banned from Jonah House, I was further forbidden from the Norfolk Catholic Worker. This community was very supportive of us after our plowshares action and remained so during our terms in prison.

By imposing such restrictions on plowshare activists, the government treats our work both as peacemakers and in service to the poor as criminal activity. For me to enter the Norfolk CW house to make sandwiches for the street breakfast, or to go to Mass, or to join in a bible study, are all considered criminal acts. In other words, to live out my faith is a crime. Never before has the government come down in this particular way on a peace activist, and there is great potential for this to become the new trend. (Indeed, the next plowshares prisoner to be released, Steve Baggarty, was forbidden to return to the CW home he and his wife founded in Norfolk, VA.)

Greg, Rachel and I were able to stay with a friend of the Norfolk CW and were able to find creative ways with the CW community to support each other. Eventually, we were all able to move to the Loaves & Fishes CW in Duluth, MN, where we plan to reside until my probation is terminated.

Children are remarkably resilient and Rachel has adapted well to all the changes. Her extended family and circle of friends has grown tremendously. Nevertheless, our family has been forced into exile. Trying to keep things in perspective, we are experiencing a small taste of what refugees from war-torn countries must feel. On a

positive note however, the government has provided us with the opportunity to strengthen community ties between the East Coast and the Midwest.

Out of this experience I again raise the idea that we look at our communities as interdependent, recognizing autonomy yet realizing we exist for a bigger reason.

Can we become flexible enough to move within this wider understanding of community so that we can offer each other very real and practical support? Can we pool our resources and creativity so that we can continue to act faithfully yet deal with our limitations as human beings? Can we open ourselves up to one another, challenge and really walk with each other so that Isaiah's vision and Christ's example stay alive?

I believe that not only can we do this, but we have already begun to do it. The outpouring of support for Greg, Rachel and me has been incredible. I feel certain that the support we received was much more than personal and that there is a recognition that the act of resistance we did as family is necessary and needs to continue.

NOTES

Excerpted from Michele Naar-Obed, *Maternal Convictions: A Mother Beats a Missile into a Plowshare* (Maple, Wisc.: Laurentian Shield Resources for Nonviolence, 1998).

1. *Editor's note:* See Arthur J. Laffin and Anne Montgomery, eds., *Swords into Plowshares: Nonviolent Direct Action for Disarmament* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

2. *Editor's note:* Isaiah 2:4: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not war against nation nor shall they study war any more."

3. *Editor's note:* Morions "in limine" seek to anticipate and control the trial's conduct.

4. *Editor's note:* Upon release from prison, Michele Naar-Obed, due to probation requirements, was prohibited from returning to Jonah House. She lived in exile of her home for sixteen months. She, her husband, and daughter spent six months with a friend from the Norfolk Catholic Workers, who had been supporters of the plowshare action and also housed other activists. For the next ten months, Naar-Obed's family lived with the Loaves and Fishes Catholic Worker community in Duluth, Minnesota. In defiance of probation, she and her family decided to return to Jonah House. Two months later, U.S. marshals arrested Michele and held her without bond pending a violation hearing. During her hearing one month later, U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark and Catholic Bishop Walter Sullivan testified as character witnesses. Sentenced to another year in federal prison without further probation requirements, she was released in June 2000 and remained with her family in Jonah House until June 2002. The family currently resides with Duluth's Loaves and Fishes Catholic Worker community.

Chapter Nineteen

Linda Evans, Susan Rosenberg, and Laura Whitehorn

Born in Fort Dodge, Iowa, in 1947, Linda Evans began her political activism in 1965, when she became involved with antiracist organizing as a student at Michigan State University. She worked with Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), organizing against the war in Vietnam and in support of Black liberation. In 1969 she traveled to Vietnam as part of a delegation from the antiwar movement. Evans was first arrested in 1970 on conspiracy charges of crossing state lines to incite a riot, and transportation of weapons. These charges were linked to Evans's work as an SDS regional organizer; charges were eventually dropped on the grounds of government misconduct: the prosecution's evidence was collected through illegal wiretaps.¹ By this time the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)'s COINTELPRO had begun a systematic attack on SDS, including the use of extensive wiretaps and infiltrations.² In the early 1970s, Evans moved to Texas, where she was active in the women's liberation movement and the lesbian community, and involved in organizing support for grassroots African American and Chicano/Mexicano movements.³ She was a member of a political guerrilla street theater group, an all-women's political band, and a political women's printing and graphics collective in Texas. She organized against the Ku Klux Klan, forced sterilization, and police brutality and fought racism, white supremacy, and Zionism as a member of the John Brown Anti-Klan Committee. She was also active in building solidarity for South African, Palestinian, and Central American liberation movements and organizing support for U.S. political prisoners. In 1985, fifteen years after her first arrest, Evans was arrested on charges of making false statements to acquire weapons. By this time she had developed an openly revolutionary stance in opposition to U.S. imperialism in Latin America, southern Africa, and other regions, and was working to develop clandestine armed struggle as a component of revolutionary strategy.⁴ Although Evans's legal counsel informed her that she would likely receive a five-year sentence because of her political affiliations, the judge sentenced her to the maximum for

each charge, and ordered that time be served consecutively: Linda Evans received a forty-year sentence.⁵ She was also charged in the "Resistance Conspiracy" case while in prison and sentenced to federal prison in California. During her imprisonment, Evans worked as a "jailhouse lawyer," organized for prisoners' rights,⁶ and worked as an HIV/AIDS peer counselor and educator. With Eve Goldberg, she coauthored the essay "The Prison Industrial Complex and the Global Economy."⁷ Linda Evans was released on executive clemency by President Clinton in 2001, and has since continued to speak and organize for prisoners' rights and in opposition to the U.S. prison industrial complex and U.S. military and economic imperialism.

Susan Rosenberg was born in New York in 1955. A doctor of acupuncture, she worked with the Black Acupuncture Advisory of North America.⁸ Rosenberg became involved with antiracist activism as a high school student in the early 1970s, organizing support for the Black Liberation and Puerto Rican independence struggles. She was involved with the student, antiwar, and women's movements. After going underground in the early 1980s, Rosenberg was arrested in New Jersey in 1984 on weapons possession charges. She was convicted and sentenced to fifty-eight years, sixteen times the national average for such an offense. The judge cited her political ideology as the reason for his decision.⁹ Rosenberg had previously been charged in the 1981 "Brink's Robbery" case in New York, but these charges against her were dismissed for lack of evidence.¹⁰ She had also been accused of being a participant in the escape of Assata Shakur from prison. As a result of her support for the Black Liberation Army, the FBI targeted Rosenberg.¹¹ In 1988, she was charged in the "Resistance Conspiracy" case, but these charges were also eventually dropped. In spite of over ten years in various forms of isolation and maximum-security conditions she continued to actively organize, teach, write, and overcome. She spent the last five years inside working as a writer and an HIV/AIDS peer educator and teacher. Her writing has appeared in journals and anthologies, including *Criminal Injustice* and *Doing Time: Twenty-Five Years of Prison Writing*.¹² She obtained her master's degree in writing in 2000. Along with Linda Evans, Susan Rosenberg was granted clemency by President Clinton in 2001. Since her release, Rosenberg has been working as a human rights and prisoner rights activist, writing a memoir, and teaching literature at the John Jay School of Criminal Justice in New York City.

Laura Whitehorn was born in 1945 in Brooklyn, New York. She began organizing in the 1960s, when as a college student she participated in the civil rights and antiwar movements. Since that time, she has been active in anti-imperialist and antiracist groups, and in the movements for women's and gay liberation. She graduated from Radcliffe College in 1966, and received her master's degree from Brandeis University, before deciding to leave graduate school because academia at that time seemed to her a poor place for the kind of activism she felt was needed. Before her imprisonment in 1985 she worked with Dr. Mutulu Shakur's National Task Force for COINTELPRO Litigation and Research to expose the FBI's COINTELPRO and organized in support of political prisoners and Puerto Rican prisoners of war and in support of prisoners' rights. She also worked actively in support of the Black Panther

Party and the Black Power movement. In the Boston area she collaborated with others to establish a women's school and helped lead a takeover of a Harvard building to protest Harvard's involvement in the war in Vietnam, an action that indirectly led to the establishment of a women's center in Cambridge that is still in existence. Several years later, during the infamous Boston busing controversy of 1974, she organized white leftists to defend the homes of black families who were the targets of white supremacist attack. In the late 1970s she moved to New York City and joined the John Brown Anti-Klan Committee to fight white supremacy and Zionism and the Madame Binh Graphics Collective, an anti-imperialist women's art group. In the early 1980s she went underground to engage in more militant forms of solidarity and resistance, hoping to build a clandestine revolutionary movement. In 1985, she was arrested by the FBI in Baltimore, and was eventually charged in the "Resistance Conspiracy" case. At the time of the "Resistance Conspiracy" indictment, Whitehorn had served three years in prison. She was placed under "preventive detention" and was denied bail on the grounds that she was an escape risk, partly based on a statement she made in court that she chose to live by "revolutionary and human principles."¹³ Whitehorn was sentenced to twenty-three years for the "Resistance Conspiracy" case.

While imprisoned, Whitehorn worked on HIV/AIDS peer education. Throughout her years in prison she contributed her artwork to publications and exhibitions, and articles to journals and anthologies, including *Cages of Steel* and *States of Confinement* as well as a regular column in *Prison Legal News*. In August 1999, Whitehorn was released from prison upon completion of her sentence ("maxing out"—i.e., completing the sentence less federally mandated "good time"). She currently lives in New York City with her lover, Susie Day, and organizes in support of political prisoners. She has worked since her release as an associate editor at *POZ*, a national magazine for those affected by HIV, focusing on HIV and hepatitis C in the prisons.

All three women are known for their roles in the "Resistance Conspiracy" case. In 1988, Linda Evans, Susan Rosenberg, and Laura Whitehorn, along with Marilyn Buck, Tim Blunk, Alan Berkman, and Elizabeth Duke (who never went to trial and is still at large), were charged with conspiracy to carry out eight political bombings in Washington, D.C., and New York from 1983 to 1985. Targets of the bombings included the U.S. Capitol, to protest the invasion of Grenada, and the South African consulate, to oppose U.S. support for the apartheid regime. Other targets concerned Zionism and police brutality. No one was harmed in any of the bombings.

Government use of the criminal justice system as a domestic counterinsurgency program enabled the state to criminalize political dissidents as "terrorists."¹⁴ Although some defendants had previously been convicted of the specific acts cited in the conspiracy charges, and the FBI admitted confusion about which individuals were actually involved in the bombings,¹⁵ at trial, Evans, Whitehorn, and Buck pled guilty to the charges in exchange for charges being dropped against their codefendants, one of whom, Alan Berkman, was suffering from cancer and in need of com-

perent medical treatment.¹⁶ The plea agreement cut years off Berkman's projected sentence, allowing him to bypass a lengthy trial and arrive at a hospital in time to receive therapy for the effects of his cancer treatments.

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NOTES

Research and draft for this biography were provided by Elizabeth Walsh.

1. *Can't Jail the Spirit: Political Prisoners in the U.S.*, 4th ed. (Chicago: Committee to End the Marion Lockdown, 1998), 173. The charges were connected to Evans's organizing for "The Days of Rage," an antiwar action in Chicago in 1969 sponsored by the Weathermen section of SDS.

2. Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars against Dissent in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 1990), 165-66.

3. "Linda Evans: Anti-Imperialist Political Prisoner," *Can't Jail the Spirit*, 173.

4. *Can't Jail the Spirit*, 173.
5. *Resistance Conspiracy* (San Francisco: Bay Area Committee to Support the Resistance Conspiracy Defendants [distributor]; Oakland: Peralta Colleges Television Production Company, videocassette, 1990).
6. *Can't Jail the Spirit*, 174.
7. Eve Goldberg and Linda Evans, "The Prison Industrial Complex and the Global Economy," prisonactivist.org/crisis/evans-goldberg.html.
8. Elihu Rosenblatt, ed., *Criminal Injustice: Confronting the Prison Crisis* (Boston: South End Press, 1996), 355.
9. Ann Nicholson, "Commutations Gained through Work of Law Faculty, Students," *Washington University Record*, Washington University in St. Louis, 6 April 2001.
10. "Communication Gained."
11. *Criminal Injustice*, 355.
12. See: Rosenblatt, *Criminal Injustice*, and Bell Gale Chevigny, ed., *Doing Time: Twenty-Five Years of Prison Writing* (New York: Arcade Publishing; distributed by Time Warner Trade Publishing, 1999).
13. Laura Whitehorn, "Preventive Detention: A Prevention of Human Rights?" in Ward Churchill et al., eds., *Cages of Steel*, (Washington, D.C.: Maisonneuve Press, 1992), 365-77.
14. *Resistance Conspiracy*.
15. *Cages of Steel*, 313.
16. "3 Plead Guilty to '83 Bombing," *New York Times*, 9 September 1990.

Dykes and Fags Want to Know

Interview with Lesbian Political Prisoners—
Linda Evans, Susan Rosenberg, and Laura Whitehorn
by the Members of QUISP

Early 1991

QUISP: I'm an activist; why haven't I heard of you before?

LAURA: I think it's because there's been a long time during which the "left" and progressive movements haven't really tried to know who's in prison—including but not limited to political prisoners and POWs. For instance, how many AIDS activists know about the many PWA's [Person/People with AIDS] in prison, and the horrible conditions they live in? Aside from Mike Riegle at GCN (*Gay Community News*), how many writers and media folks in our movements try to reach into the prisons to support lesbian and gay prisoners, whose lives are often made pretty rough by the pigs? [Riegle, a gay activist and writer who cofounded Boston's Prison Books program, died of AIDS in 1991.]

In general, this country tries to shut prisoners away and make people outside forget about us. In the case of political prisoners, multiply that times X for the simple fact that our existence is a danger to the smooth, quiet running of the system: our existence shows that this great demokkracy is a lie. The government doesn't want you to know who we are—that's why they try so hard to label us "terrorists" and "criminals."

LINDA: Political prisoners have been purposely "disappeared" by the U.S. government, whose official position is that "there are no political prisoners inside the U.S." This is the way that the government denies both that the motivations for our actions were political and that the movements we come from are legitimate, popular movements for social change. The prison system isolates all prisoners from their communities, but especially harsh isolation is instituted against political prisoners: restricted visiting lists, frequent transfers to prisons far away from our home communities, mail censorship, "maximum security conditions," long periods of time in solitary confinement.

But our own political movement, too, has ignored the existence of political prisoners. I think this has largely been a product of racism—most U.S. political prisoners/POWs are Black and Puerto Rican comrades who have been locked up for over a decade. Unfortunately there has never been widespread support among progressive white people for the Black Liberation struggle, for Puerto Rican independence,

or for Native American sovereignty struggles—and these are the movements that the Black/Puerto Rican/Native American political prisoners/POWs come from.

Also, many political activists have actually withheld support for political prisoners/POWs because of disagreements with tactics that were employed, or with actions of which the political prisoners have been accused or convicted. These disagreements are tactical in nature, and shouldn't be allowed to obscure the fact that we all have been fighting for justice and social change. This withdrawal of support leads to false divisions amongst us, and actually helps the state in its strategy to isolate political prisoners/POWs from our communities and political movements.

SUSAN: The activists/radicals of the late 1980s and 1990s have to reclaim the history of resistance that emerged and continued through the 1970s and 1980s. As long as the government and mass media get to define who and what is important then the real lessons contained in our and others' experiences will get lost. People haven't heard of us (except as a vague memory of a headline—if that) because there is a very serious government counter-insurgency strategy to bury the revolutionaries who have been captured in prison. I have been in prison six years and over half of that time was spent in solitary confinement or small-group isolation thousands of miles away from my community and family. My experience is similar to the 100–150 other political prisoners in the U.S. If the individuals from different movements (i.e., the Black, Puerto Rican, Native American and white movements who have seen the need for organized resistance to oppression) are destroyed it is a way to delegitimize the demands of the movements.

QUISP: Did you do it? Did the government misrepresent what you did? If so, how?

LAURA: Yes, I did it! I did (do) resist racism, sexism, imperialism with every fiber of my queer being, and I believe we need to fight for justice. The government's "version" of what I/we did is a complete lie, though, in that they call resistance a crime. It's sort of like the way [Senator] Jesse Helms [R-NC] calls us "sick"—he's as sick as you can get. On the morality meter he doesn't even make the needle move. Same way the U.S. government, a genocidal system, calls acts of revolutionary struggle "terrorist violence," and their system of law, "justice."

LINDA: Yes, I'm proud that I've been part of the struggle to build an armed clandestine resistance movement that can fight to support national liberation struggles, and that will fight for revolution in the U.S. Of course the government misrepresented what we did first of all by calling us "terrorists" to make people think we were a danger to the community, as if our purpose was to terrorize or kill people. Quite the contrary: all the armed actions of the last twenty years have been planned to minimize any risk of human life. This, of course, is in stark contrast to the actions of the terrorist government, which is responsible world-wide for supporting death squads and mercenary armies like the contras and [Jonas] Savimbi's UNITA¹ in

Angola, which supports the Israeli war of genocide against the Palestinians and the brutal system of apartheid, and which supports daily police brutality in Black and Third World communities here, even such acts as the aerial bombing of MOVE in Philadelphia in 1985, which killed eleven people and created a firestorm that left over 250 people homeless.

SUSAN: I have been a revolutionary for much of my life. A revolutionary in the sense that I believe in the need for profound social change that goes to the roots of the problem. Which I believe is systemic. Consequently I have along with others tried many methods of struggle to enact a strategy to win liberation and attack the state (government) as representative of the system. First as a peace activist in the late 1960s, then as a political activist in the 1970s, and then in joining the armed clandestine resistance movement that was developing in the 1980s. I am guilty of revolutionary anti-imperialist resistance. Of course the government has misrepresented me and all of us. The main form that has taken is to call us terrorists, which is something that couldn't be further from the truth. Just like all opposition to the cold war of the 1950s was labeled communist, the 1980s equivalent is terrorist. Now there are all kinds of terrorists according to the U.S.—all of it bullshit. I don't mean to beg the question in the specific, I believe that no revolutionary captured comrade says what they have or haven't done within their revolutionary work.

QUISP: Audre Lorde says the master's tools (violence) will never dismantle the master's house (the state).² How do you react to this?

LAURA: I don't think "violence" is just one thing, so I don't think it's necessarily "the master's tool." If revolutionaries were as vicious and careless of humanity and innocent human lives as the U.S. government is, then I think we'd be doing wrong. But when oppressed people fight for freedom, using "violent" means among others, I think we should support them. Would you have condemned African slaves in the U.S. for killing their slave masters, or for using violence in a struggle for freedom? To me, the issue is how do we fight effectively—and humanely—for liberation. As we build the struggle, we have to be very self-critical, very self-conscious about how we struggle as well as what we struggle for. But I think we also need to fight to win—and I think that means engaging in a fight for power. For the past five and more years, I've witnessed close up the violence—slow, brutal, heartless genocide against African American women. To refuse to fight to change that (and I don't believe we can fight for power completely "nonviolently") would, I think, be to accept the violence of the state in the name of rejecting the violence of revolutionary struggle.

LINDA: I disagree with posing the question in the way she does (or how the question does). I don't think the issue is violence, but rather politics and power. Around the world, imperialism maintains itself—keeps itself in power—by military power

and the threat of violence wherever people struggle for change. Liberation movements have the right to use every means available to defeat the system that is oppressing and killing people. This means fighting back in self-defense, and it means an offensive struggle for people's power and self-determination. But reducing it to a tactical question of "violent means" doesn't recognize all the aspects of building a revolutionary movement that are crucial to actually mobilizing people, developing popular organizations, empowering oppressed groups within the people's movement like women and indigenous people, developing a revolutionary program that can really meet people's needs and that people will fight to make real. A slogan that embodies this for me comes from the Chinese Revolution: "Without mass struggle, there can be no revolution. Without armed struggle, there can be no victory."

SUSAN: I always took the quote from Audre Lorde to mean the opposite of what you say. Funny, no? I always interpreted her saying that to mean the master's tools being electoral/slow change. Well—there you go!

QUISP: Why is it important to support political as opposed to non-political prisoners? Shouldn't we be concerned about all prisoners?

LAURA: I think we should be concerned about all prisoners, and I don't think it's ever been we political prisoners who have promoted any irresolvable contradiction between us and the rest of the prisoners in the U.S. But within that, I think there is a particular need for progressive movements to defend political prisoners, because it's a part of fighting for the movements we come from. If you are fighting racism and homophobia, and there are people serving long sentences in prison for fighting those things, I think you advance the goals by supporting the prisoners. I also think that support for political prisoners helps expose how repressive and unjust the whole system is. That can also be an avenue to supporting all prisoners.

Support for political prisoners is a concrete act of resistance to the control the government keeps over all our minds: it fights the isolation and silencing of political prisoners and POWs. It asserts the legitimacy of resistance. And in my experience it is a major way that people outside become aware of the purpose and nature of the prison system as a whole.

LINDA: Yes—it's important for our movement to be concerned about all prisoners, and I think it's especially important for the lesbian and gay movement to concern ourselves with combating attacks on lesbian/gay prisoners, and supporting all prisoners with AIDS. Concerning ourselves with all prisoners, and with the repressive/warehousing role of prisons in our society is another way of fighting racism, since the majority of prisoners are from Third World communities. Prisoners get locked away—out of sight, out of mind—and the few prisoners' rights that were won in prison struggles are being undermined and cut back. Human rights are nearly non-

existent in prison, and without community support and awareness, the government can continue to escalate its repressive policies, and conditions will just steadily worsen. This is especially true for prisoners with AIDS, since the stigma attached to AIDS in society generally is heightened in prison. Prisoners with AIDS die at an even faster rate than PWAs on the outside because treatment is so sporadic, limited, and conditions are so bad. So I would never say for people to support political prisoners as opposed to nonpolitical prisoners. Our interests inside prison are definitely not in opposition to each other. All the political prisoners/POWs actively fight for prisoners' rights, and for changes in conditions that will benefit all prisoners. But it's important to build support specifically for political prisoners because we represent our movements, and it's a way for us to protect and defend the political movements we come from against government repression. For the movement on the outside to embrace and support political prisoners/POWs makes it possible for us to continue to participate in and contribute to the movement we come from and it makes it impossible for the government to isolate and repress us in their efforts to destroy our political identities.

SUSAN: All prisoners are in desperate need of support, and as the population gets greater (in prison) and the repression gets heavier the prisons will become a major confrontation within the society. If the prisons are to become a social front of struggle then there must be a consciousness developed to fight the dehumanization and criminalization that prison intends. Political prisoners are important to support because we are in prison for explicitly social/political/progressive goals. Our lack of freedom does affect how free you are. If we can be violated, so can you. There is no contradiction between political and social prisoners.

QUISP: How does being a lesbian fit in with your work?

LAURA: The same way it fits into my life—it is a basic, crucial part of my character, my outlook on things, my personality. Because I'm a lesbian, the fight against homophobia and sexism takes on particular importance. But really I think my lesbianism helps me care about the oppression of others by the imperialist system. So I think my lesbianism makes me a better anti-imperialist—it makes me fight all the harder. Being a lesbian in prison is often very hard, but being "out" gives me a lot of strength. I have to say that I am very proud when I hear or read about the struggles queers are waging out there.

LINDA: Being a lesbian has always been an important part of the reasons why I'm a revolutionary—even before I was self-conscious about how important this is to me! I don't separate "being a lesbian" from any other part of my life, or from my politics. Because I experience real oppression as a lesbian and as a woman, I am personally committed from the very core of my being to winning liberation for women, lesbians, and all oppressed people. This makes me more willing to take risks

and to fight, because I have a vision of a society I want to live in, and to win for future generations, where these forms of oppression don't exist. I think being a lesbian has also helped me recognize the importance of mutual solidarity and support between the struggles of oppressed people, despite the sexism, heterosexism and racism that often interfere in the process of building these alliances. I really believe that we have a common enemy—the imperialist system—and that we have to support each other in all the forms our struggles against that enemy may take. These alliances need to be built in a way that respects the integrity of our various movements.

SUSAN: Well! Being a lesbian is part of the very fabric of my being—so the question is not really how it fits into my work, rather how conscious do I make my lesbianism in living in prison or in the life of resistance I lead. It alternates depending on what the conditions are. Recently I have "come out" because at this point I have chosen to be more consciously lesbian-identified. I have done this because I believe that as gay people we need more revolutionary visions and strategies if our movement is to become significant in linking the overturning of sexual oppression with other forms of oppression. The other reason I have felt compelled to be out is that the tightest, most important women in the community we live in are the butches. It is the butches who suffer most for their choices/existence in prison. In recognition of Pete, Cowboy, Juju, Slimmie, and all the other sisters it seems only right. Finally—Laura and Linda have been out since the RCC6 [Resistance Conspiracy Case 6] began and it has been a very important political and personal experience for them and for us all.³ They have through their struggles created an environment of love and solidarity that enabled me to subsequently "come out" as well.

QUISP: How have you struggled with sexism and heterosexism in the groups with which you have worked?

LAURA: Mostly by confronting people when I think they are being sexist or heterosexist, and by fighting for women's liberation and lesbian and gay liberation to be included not just as words but as real goals. The saddest times for me have been those times when I was in groups where we didn't do this. I think it's very important for people to be able to struggle for a variety of goals without setting up a hierarchy or exclusive list. I will continue to join groups whose main program is, for example, anti-racism or support for Palestine or Puerto Rico, because those things are just as necessary for my liberation as women's and lesbian liberation are. And I won't demand that my liberation be made a part of every agenda. But I won't ever deny my identity, my right to be respected, and the urgency and legitimacy of lesbian, gay and women's liberation, either.

SUSAN: I have become much more of a feminist over the last number of years—and by that I mean ideologically and politically I believe we have to examine the

position of women, the structures of the society and how male dominance defines women's position in all things. I don't think in the past I fought against the subjugation of women and gay people enough. I substituted my own independence as a woman with actively struggling against political and social forms of oppression. For example: in Nicaragua now, the women militants of the FSLN [Sandinista National Liberation Front] are reevaluating their practice of struggling against sexism, and some of them are self-critical that they subordinated the struggle of women to the needs of the so-called greater societal good. What it means now is that abortion and the struggle for reproductive rights under the new non-revolutionary society are being set back generations, and the level of consciousness among women is not (at this point) strong enough to effectively challenge this development. I believe that to subordinate either women or gay people and our demands is a big mistake.

QUISP: What is the connection between the primarily white middle class gay rights movement and the struggles of other oppressed people? How do we envision a gay movement that encompasses other struggles?

LAURA: I believe that any struggle of "primarily white middle class" people has the danger of being irrelevant to real social change unless it allies itself with the struggles of oppressed people. This country has a great track record for buying off sectors that have privilege. Once that happens, not only do things stay the same, they get worse. But even more than that, I feel that we cannot be full human beings unless we fight for all the oppressed. Otherwise, our struggle is just as individualist and racist as the dominant society. In that case, we'll never win anything worth fighting for. I think the queer movement needs to talk to other movements and communities, in order to work out common strategies and figure out how to support one another. I think we need to talk to groups in the national liberation struggles in order to figure out how to set our agenda and strategy—like what demands can we raise in the fights about AIDS that can help other communities fighting AIDS? It's a struggle, not necessarily an easy process, but it's crucial. It's also true that our movement has already adopted lessons from other movements—often without even realizing or recognizing it. We've especially incorporated strategic concepts developed (at a high cost!) by the Black Liberation struggle from the Civil Rights movement to the Black Power and human rights struggle. It's no accident that Stonewall's leadership was Third World gay men and lesbians.⁴ So I think it's important to recognize that whenever we pose the question of alliances and coalitions, we don't need to "encompass" other people, we need to ally with them, learn from, and struggle side by side with them. We need to support them. And we need to fight for them as well as for ourselves, because the second we accept divisions or ignore the urgency of fighting racism, we lose.

LINDA: I don't think that struggles against sexism or homophobia or racism can be delayed, because these are forms of discrimination/oppression that actively dis-

empower individuals and groups of people who can be mobilized to actively participate in the struggle. Racism, sexism, and heterosexism cannot be tolerated in our movement or in our alliances because we don't want to duplicate the oppression that we're fighting against. Of course the process of building these alliances is difficult and long-term, because building trust and respect requires building relationships that are really different from those that exist in society in general. So I don't think the primarily white middle-class gay rights movement can, or should, "encompass" other struggles. White middle class gay men and women cannot set the agenda for other movements or for other communities. Rather, I think that this movement should actively support struggles against other forms of oppression as a way of making our own movement stronger, more revolutionary, less self-centered, and more supportive of the goal of liberation and self-determination for all oppressed people.

SUSAN: This is a big question and has many aspects to it. I can only offer a small answer, as I believe that prisoners who have no social practice in a movement because of being locked up have a warped or limited understanding of the real dynamics in the free world movements. The gay movement as it is currently constituted has reemerged since I have been in prison so I have not been a part of its development. I don't think the gay movement can be relevant to other oppressed peoples and their struggles without an anti-imperialist analysis of the roots of gay oppression and then correspondingly a practice that implements that. In other words a movement that is led by white middle class men—even those oppressed because of their sexual identification/orientation—without ceding power (within the movement) to Third World women and men, and dealing with their agendas will never be anything but reform-oriented. To only struggle for gay rights without struggling for the rights (human and democratic) of all those in need, and specifically those who are nationally oppressed sets up competing struggle rather than a cohesive radical opposition to the government.

QUISP: What was going on in your life that led you to participate in or support armed struggle?

LAURA: I began supporting armed struggle in the late 1960s, when I realized the government would keep on killing Third World people if left to its own devices. The murder of Fred Hampton (chairman of the Chicago BPP) by the Chicago pigs and FBI was a turning point, not only because it was an assassination, not only because the state tried to cover it up, but also because it made me understand that the U.S. would never agree to "give" oppressed nations their human rights. That's why the government had to kill Fred, and Malcolm X, and so many other leaders.

I'd hated the injustice of this society for years, but it was in the 1960s, when I supported the Vietnamese, Native American struggles, the Black struggle, Puerto Rico and saw those nations waging struggles for freedom that included armed strug-

gle—that I started to see that there could be a struggle to win. Once I began supporting Third World nations' right to use armed struggle to win self-determination, it made sense to me that I should be willing to use many forms of struggle to fight, too.

Mostly, I think that it's my vision of what a wonderful thing it would be to live in a just, humane, creative world that motivates me to embrace armed struggle as one part of what it takes to fight for a new society.

LINDA: When I first became a political activist, I was a pacifist. I had never experienced real violence in my own life, and naively hoped that the changes I envisioned could come about non-violently. Then, I got beat over the head and teargassed by cops guarding the Pentagon at my first major demonstration. I came "head-to-head" with the fact that this system maintains its power through violence on every level—from beating up protesters, to genocide against internally-colonized nations, to waging war against nationally-colonized nations, to waging war against the people of Vietnam.

I became an activist in a time that was defined by the victories and development of national liberation struggles around the world and inside the U.S. I was especially inspired by the Vietnamese and by Black people struggling for civil rights and then for Black Power/Black Liberation. Vietnamese women fighters and Black women in the struggle were role models for me because they were dedicated to fighting until victory was won. Their courage and dedication, their willingness to risk everything for freedom, the fact that women were being empowered by the process of struggle—all were exemplary.

So by supporting these national liberation struggles I came to support the right of oppressed people to fight for liberation by any means necessary. Malcolm X, Che Guevara, and Ho Chi Minh were important influences in my life and political development. But I actually became determined to participate in armed struggle because of the rage I felt after the FBI/police raids on Black Panther Party offices and homes all over the U.S. and particularly the murder of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark by Chicago police.

The intensity of this police terrorism against the Black community in so many cities made me realize that whenever a political movement even begins to threaten the stability of the status quo, the state will act in whatever ways it must to destroy it. In order for a revolutionary movement and vision to prevail, therefore, it's necessary for us to defend ourselves and our comrades, and to build our own capacities toward a day when we can seriously challenge the repressive power of the state, so that state power can be taken out of the hands of those who use it to oppress, and, instead, taken over by the people themselves. I know this sounds idealistic, yet it is a struggle that has succeeded in many countries around the world.

I believed then—as I do now—that U.S. imperialism was the main enemy of the people of the world, and I wanted to fight on the side of the oppressed to build a better world for all. This was the era of Che Guevara's call for "two, three, many

Vietnams," and I recognized that the U.S. government depends on the "domestic tranquility" of its population to allow for imperialist interventions around the world. This is one reason the Black Liberation struggle was such a threat, and why white people fighting in solidarity with national liberation struggles were threatening as well. That's part of the reason that the repression of the internal liberation movements was so immediate and devastating and why there were such efforts to divide off white struggles from these struggles.

SUSAN: The war against the Black Liberation movement by the FBI/U.S. government was most influential for me in seeing the necessity for armed self-defense. The challenge placed on us who were in a position of solidarity with revolutionary nationalist Black organizations was to uphold self-determination and to fight for it. The other element that most personally propelled me into armed clandestine resistance was witnessing the genocide of the chemical war being waged in the South Bronx against Black and Puerto Rican people. As a doctor of acupuncture and community health worker I watched us fail to stop the plague.

QUISP: What do you do all day?

LAURA: My time is divided among: fighting for decent conditions and against the prison's denial of those things (a daily necessity!), working on my political and legal work, communicating with people via letters and phone calls, talking to other prisoners (and working with them to try to deal with legal issues, health issues, etc.), meeting with my codefendants, trying to find out how my comrade Alan is (he's engaged in a hard, life-and-death battle with cancer, shackled to a bed in the I.C.U. oncology unit at D.C. General Hospital [Since this interview took place, Alan has recovered and was released from prison in July 1992.]). I spend a lot of time talking to women about AIDS—by one estimate, 40–50% of the women in here are HIV positive, yet there is no program, no education, no counseling provided. Like my other comrades, I spend a lot of time doing informal counseling and education on this.

LINDA: Work and work out.

SUSAN: Because I am a doctor of acupuncture and a conscious person, I have become (in addition to a political prisoner) a peer advocate/AIDS counselor. It is not recognized by the jail but I spend seventy-five percent of my time counseling people—women who are HIV positive. The other time is spent doing my other work, and talking with others. We spend a lot of the day locked down in our cells. Because of the overcrowding and lack of programs, the administration keeps us locked down an enormous amount of time.

QUISP: How do you deal with your white privilege in jail?

LAURA: I struggle to be aware of it; I fight racism actively and organize for that fight; I try to make the resources that I have access to, available to others. Educating people about how to fight AIDS is another way, because that's information that the gay and lesbian movement has that women in the D.C. Jail lack—and it means that women are continuing to contract HIV every day. That is a crime.

LINDA: I try to use the resources and education I've had access to as a result of my white privilege to benefit all the prisoners I live with and to fight for our interests. This takes many forms, from struggling as a prisoner for the institution of AIDS education and counseling programs, to helping individual women with legal problems or abuses of their rights by the jail. When I was in jail in Louisiana, we were able to win a jailhouse lawyer's legal suit forcing the jail to give women glasses and false teeth (all jail dental care amounts to is pulling teeth, and few jails replace them). One of the conflicts I confront is between dealing with immediate needs and crises as an individual counselor/agitator/jailhouse lawyer, and always pushing the institution to provide the services and programs that prisoners should be entitled to as a basic human right—education, medical care, exercise, mental health and AIDS counseling.

SUSAN: Well! I struggle against racism in every way I can. I have learned patience, and how to be quiet, and how to really listen to who is talking, and what they are saying.

QUISP: What observations or advice do you have for lesbian/gay and AIDS activists as we start to experience police surveillance, harassment and abuse?

LAURA: Fight it. Don't back away. Develop clandestine ways of operating so that the state won't know everything that you're doing. Support one another so that when anyone is targeted for state attack, they can resist—that resistance will build us all. Don't ever give information—even if you think it's "safe" information—to the state. Don't let the state divide the movement by calling some groups "legitimate" and others not. Unity is our strength. Support other movements and people who are also targets of state attack. When the state calls someone a "terrorist," or "violent," or "crazy," or anything, think hard before ever believing it to be true. Resist. Resist. Resist.

LINDA: Be cool. Develop a clandestine consciousness. Value your work enough that you don't talk to the enemy about it (like over tapped phones). Don't underestimate the power and viciousness of the state, and don't expect white privilege to make you exempt from repression. Take the lessons of past repression against political movements seriously—not to demobilize you or make you afraid, but to safe-

guard and defend your work. Remember you're building for the future, not just for today, and keep struggling to broaden your vision. Remember that reforms are only temporary concessions, that they're neither permanent nor do they really solve fundamental problems.

SUSAN: Study other movements here and around the world and examine the state's methods in order to develop tactics that allow you to keep functioning. Very important, if one self-consciously is building a movement that knows the state will destroy it if the movement begins to pose a real or perceived threat.

QUISP: What is your position on go-go girls in women's bars?

LAURA: Take me to a bar and we'll have a scintillating discussion of this issue, OK?

LINDA: Take me to a bar and I'll let you know!

SUSAN: I think that anything that objectifies women as sexual objects (versus sexual beings) is anti-woman. Even in an all-woman context. Being lesbian is subversive because women loving women is a crime against the state, and against the bourgeois patriarchal morality of this society—but being subversive doesn't necessarily mean it's about liberation. If nothing else I have learned that liberation and the need for it begins in oneself. Objectification/sexual stereotypes/misogyny not only destroy us in the world, they corrode our own hearts. I am not interested in a society that promotes those things. Although I don't believe that they will be ended until we decide to end them—they cannot be overturned through the law of this state.

NOTES

This interview was conducted in early 1991 while Evans, Whitehorn, and Rosenberg were housed in a Washington, D.C., jail. It was first made available by QUISP in 1991.

Editor's note: QUISP (Queer women and men In Solidarity with Political Prisoners, 1991–1996) was a New York City collective of lesbians and gay men organizing community support for political prisoners in the United States. A QUISP leaflet stated, "we do this work because we believe that our liberation as queers is tied to the liberation of all oppressed peoples. QUISP believes that just as different oppressions—be they racism, classism, sexism, or homophobia—are intertwined, so too must our efforts for progressive social change be mutually supporting."

1. *Editor's note:* Jonas Savimbi was killed in February 2002. UNITA was a counterrevolutionary or contra paramilitary group funded by first the South African apartheid government and then by the U.S. government. It was associated with massive and horrific human rights violations. See Elaine Windrich, *The Cold War Guerrilla: Jonas Savimbi, the U.S. Media, and the Angolan War* (New York: Greenwood, 1992).

2. *Editor's note:* See Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *"Sister Outsider": Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, Calif.: The Crossing, 1984). Lorde's comments were initially directed at the patriarchal and racist politics of the 1979 Second Sex Conference in New York at which she made this speech. The comments are not specifically about violence, but about the way that the women's movement reproduces hegemonic and repressive structures in their own organizations and politics:

Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged into the crucibles of difference—those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are black, who are older—know that *survival is not an academic skill*. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. *For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support. ("*Sister Outsider*," 112)

3. *Editor's note:* RCC6 refers to the Resistance Conspiracy 6: Alan Berkman, Marilyn Buck, Susan Rosenberg, Linda Evans, Laura Whitehorn, and Tim Blunk, the six white anti-imperialists who fought in the Armed Resistance Unit, Red Guerilla Resistance; worked to free political prisoners; and worked in solidarity with Puerto Rican *independentistas* and Black Liberationists. They were convicted under federal criminal statutes for conspiring to change and alter government policy. See the documentary *Resistance Conspiracy* (San Francisco: Bay Area Committee to Support the Resistance Conspiracy Defendants [distributor], Oakland: Peralta Colleges Television [PCTV] Production Company, 1990). Videocassette.

4. *Editor's note:* The Stonewall Rebellion refers to an incident in June of 1969, in which the New York City police raided a popular gay bar in Greenwich Village. The mostly black and Latino "queens" inside responded to years of harassment and abuse from the police by fighting back in violent protest. The resistance that took place over a series of nights became known as the "Stonewall Riots." The rebellion is considered the beginning of a new militancy in the movement for gay liberation. Stonewall has been widely misinterpreted by a white hegemonic (gay) appropriation of the historical moment, erasing the fact that the Stonewall rebels were primarily working-class men of color.

Chapter Twenty

José Solís Jordan

José Solís Jordan was born in 1952 in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Growing up in a military family, he spent part of his youth in Long Beach, California, where his father was stationed on a naval base. Jordan was educated in both private and public junior and high schools in Puerto Rico when his father was transferred to a U.S. military base on the island. After receiving his undergraduate degree at Texas Christian University, Jordan returned to Puerto Rico to teach in the public school system.

In 1987 he received his doctorate degree in education at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. Jordan organized with the U.S.-based Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), serving in 1989 as a translator for CISPES in El Salvador. From 1991 to 1995, Jordan taught at DePaul University and worked at the Puerto Rican Cultural Center in Chicago with his wife, Martha.¹ He then returned to Puerto Rico with his wife and five children to teach at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) at the Eugenio Maria de Hostos College of Education.

As a professor at UPR, Jordan became a member of La Asociación de Profesores Puertorriqueños Universitario (APPU) (the Puerto Rican Association of University Professors). The association addressed university problems and participated in various labor strikes.² Both in Chicago and in Puerto Rico, Jordan was politically involved in the Independence movement.

Jordan was first arrested after an FBI commando raid of his San Juan home on November 6, 1997. Despite lack of physical evidence, he was accused of being a participant in the December 10, 1992, bombing of a U.S. Army recruiting station in Chicago.³ He was charged with a four-count indictment of conspiracy, possession of explosives, causing destruction to property of the United States, and attempted destruction of government property. Jordan was convicted by a federal jury on March 12, 1999. During the trial, the FBI relied almost exclusively on the testimony of Rafael Marrero, an FBI agent provocateur who worked at Chicago's Puerto Rican Cultural Center from 1987 to 1995. It is alleged that Marrero himself may have been a participant in the 1992 bombing.⁴ On July 7, 1999, Jordan was sentenced to fifty-one months in prison and was incarcerated at the Federal Correc-

tional Institution in Coleman, Florida. One of the "Faltan 6" (six remain) Puerto Rican political prisoners/prisoners of war incarcerated for their involvement in the struggle for Puerto Rican independence, Jordan served the remainder of his sentence in a correctional halfway house in Puerto Rico. He currently lives in Puerto Rico.

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NOTES

Research and draft for this biography were provided by Hana Tauber.

1. "José Solís Jordan," *Can't Jail the Spirit*, 5th ed. (Chicago: Committee to End the Marion Lockdown, 2002).
2. Michael Rodriguez, "In His Own Words: Interview with José Solís Jordan," *Que Ondee Sola* (student publication of Northeastern Illinois University), January 1999, reprinted in *The Critical Criminologist*, July 1999, sun.soci.niu.edu/~critcrim/CC/Solis/Solis-int.html (22 July 2002).
3. "José Solís Jordan."
4. Rodriguez, "In His Own Words: Interview with José Solís Jordan."

This Is Enough!

September 2001

"*¡Maestro, estas bien?*" (Teacher, are you okay?) I heard, as if coming from a distance. Stopping from my regular meditative walk, I turned and realized that the question had been asked by a fellow prisoner working out at a pull-up bar on the prison yard. My attention was suddenly drawn to a small bird that had, for whatever reason, and who knows why, decided to sit atop the razor wire at the highest point of the fences. Looking at that incredible scene, I smiled and answered, "*Si, muy bien, gracias*" (Yes, fine, thank you). Later that day I was told that the question arose out of a concern for my well being, since the inmates had been watching me walk very slowly, an exercise rarely practiced. I remember telling them something like, "sometimes the objective is to walk or move very slowly, if not to be still." Quite naturally I guess, these guys associated moving slowly with being sad, troubled or depressed—that is, something negative. More significantly, many who find my outlook perplexing often question me. "You must like this place," I've been told. "I am here, and here I struggle, and this is good." This then is the point. As a Puerto Rican political prisoner incarceration is but the reaffirmation of the truth. I have been imprisoned because I insist on freedom, the freedom made possible only by the decolonization of Puerto Rico; a process that is our human right.

Our home had been invaded, our land. Dressed as commandos, the FBI arrested me. The house was pepper-sprayed and I was stripped naked in front of my family in our living room. Over twenty feds pointed their weapons at me. Handcuffed, I stood there surrounded by these agents of "justice" and for a fleeting moment contemplated the irony of being handcuffed. They were ordered to restrain me because I am free. The handcuffs only underscored this fact. Everything about the arrest and subsequent processes aimed at separating, decontextualizing and imposing the will of the feds. Completely oblivious to any sense of what an arrest is, I was quickly overcome by solitude. There it was, silence amidst the noise, floating about in a sea strange to me and somehow empowering, somehow so humiliating. Silence would become my friend, solitude my classroom.

I am an educator. As a teacher I've grown accustomed to the pressures of the profession: rush, deadlines, books, read, write, meet, grade, rush and move, move constantly. I would like to share with you a short story about my education as a Puerto Rican political prisoner, as a human committed to human freedom. But first, I feel compelled to contextualize this reality. It remains troubling to me the problematic treatment that so many scholars continue to exercise on the topic of Puerto Rico–U.S. relations, if the topic is even treated. Generally speaking, and this is unfortunate, rather than carefully studying Puerto Rico's colonial status, mainstream academe and critical scholars do themselves and their studies a disfavor and

all of us an injustice by essentially subscribing to the conventional view and official discourse regarding Puerto Rico.

HISTORY

On November 25, 1897, Spain granted Puerto Rico autonomy through the Autonomous Charter. Among the sections of the charter that highlighted Puerto Rico's autonomy, Article Two provided that: "[The charter] shall not be amended except by virtue of a special law and upon the petition of the insular parliament." Thus, the Treaty of Paris, which ceded Puerto Rico to the United States from Spain was a violation of International Law, an act of violence following the invasion of July 25, 1898, and a violation of the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, as Puerto Rico became what it remains: a non-incorporated territory of the United States. This property (Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans) belonging to the United States violates the Thirteenth Amendment prohibition against treating persons as chattel, subject to ownership by others as mere appendages to the land. In the words of William McKinley, President of the United States, "while we are at war and until its conclusion, we must keep all we can get. When the war is over we must keep what we want."¹ And so we lived under military rule for nearly two years. With the passage of the Foraker Act of 1900, government in Puerto Rico was appointed by the president of the United States.

Under the Foraker Act, Congress stated that the people of Puerto Rico were citizens of Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico would also have a House of Delegates made up of eleven members. Six would be presidential appointees and five elected. Decisions on legislative matters would be determined by a majority. Naturally, the governor held veto power. In 1917, under the second organic act, the Jones Act, Congress passed legislation to make Puerto Ricans citizens of the United States. Why was legislation necessary to confer citizenship upon inhabitants of a territory? Because Puerto Rico was (as it is) a non-incorporated territory of the United States, according to the U.S. Constitution, belonging to, but not a part of, the United States. Resistance to U.S. citizenship was widespread in Puerto Rico. Senator Arthur Yager expressed in 1914, "that we give them [i.e., Puerto Ricans] simply an opportunity to become citizens without any cost or delay—just offer it to them and let them have an opportunity to take it or leave it."² On April 1, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson declared, "We welcome the new citizens, not as a stranger but as one entering his father's house."³ Reaction from Washington to the resistance presented our people with a catch-22. First, Congress reminded Puerto Rico's delegates that any quarrel over U.S. citizenship was not a domestic issue and so not to be addressed by the U.S. Congress, and any insistence upon the Congress to address the issue first required that the people be U.S. citizens. Secondly, any Puerto Rican not wanting U.S. citizenship could refuse it but, by doing so, could not hold public office and would be severely limited in terms of private progress. The Fourteenth Amendment

to the U.S. Constitution affirms: "all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States" (emphasis added).

Puerto Ricans born in Puerto Rico after it became a United States possession were not U.S. citizens as in other territorial possessions for two fundamental reasons:

First, because by the Treaty of Paris, the political status of the inhabitants of the ceded territories was left to the determination of Congress, and Congress in the pursuance of that treaty made Puerto Ricans and the children born to them subsequently, "citizens of Puerto Rico." And secondly, because the Fourteenth Amendment is only coextensive throughout the United States, and the United States did not include unincorporated territories like Puerto Rico, as decided in *Downs v Bidwell* (1900 Supreme Court Decision: Puerto Rico belonged to the United States but was not a part of the United States). The collective nationalization of the inhabitants effected by the Jones Act of 1917 is conclusive evidence that those born subsequently to the transfer of sovereignty from Spain were never American citizens.⁴

And so U.S. citizenship was imposed on those that Congress had already recognized as citizens of Puerto Rico (under the Foraker Act, 1900).

Between 1900 and the establishment of what is referred to as the *Estado Libre Asociado* (Free Associated State) or Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in 1952, the people struggled for the right to self-determine and decolonize Puerto Rico. *Independientistas* were persecuted, imprisoned and killed. Setting the stage for a Puerto Rican elected governor in 1947, Washington and the aspiring gubernatorial candidate, Luis Marín, passed a law criminalizing the struggle for national liberation. The law was known as "*la Ley de la Mordaza*" (The Muzzle Law). Even speech and publication of pro-independence materials became felonious acts.

In its Report (1832) in 1952, the United States House of Representatives declared that:

It is important that the nature and general scope of 5.3336 be absolutely clear. The bill under consideration would not change Puerto Rico's fundamental political, social and economic relationship to the United States.⁵

Puerto Rico became in 1952 what it is today, what it was in 1900 and 1917, a non-incorporated territory, a colony with another name—The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (El Estado Tibu Asociado de Puerto Rico). Representative Fred Crawford reaffirmed Congress' position that, "Puerto Rico can be a colonized possession and have a great deal to say about her own government under which the Puerto Ricans live." Congressman Javits drove the point home noting that, "the only thing we agree to now is that you should have a constitution within the organic act. . . . Congress controls the organic act."⁶

In his 1989 State of the Union Address, President George Bush urged Congress

to "[t]ake the necessary steps to authorize a federally recognized process allowing the people of Puerto Rico, for the first time since the Treaty of Paris, to freely express their wishes regarding their future political status," a step in the process of self-determination which the Congress has yet to authorize. And again in 1991, Attorney General Richard Thornburg echoed the colonial reality by stating that, "the Congress of the United States holds full power over Puerto Rico, a relationship Puerto Ricans are incapable of altering."⁷

Speaking in terms of economics, the principal strategy of the industrialization project in Puerto Rico has been based on the attraction of capital through the incentive of high rates of profit. "One of the consequences of foreign capital is the external factor payments (non-distributed corporate profits, dividends and interests which exit the country) which are reflected in the extraordinary gap between the Gross Domestic Product (the value of Puerto Rico's production) and the Gross National Product (the payment of workers and entrepreneurs who reside in Puerto Rico)."⁸ 1981 Nobel Prize Laureate in Economics James Tobin highlighted the problem by assuming that:

The difference between the Gross Domestic Product and the Gross National Product and their respective growth rates are [sic] an additional reflection of Puerto Rico's increasing dependency on foreign resources in order to foster growth. From the point of view of Puerto Rico's residents, high levels and increasing growth rate of the Gross Domestic Product are of meager significance if they are not accompanied by high levels and relatively high growth rate of the Gross National Product.⁹

Today:

- 70% of domestic income of capital owners leaves Puerto Rico.
- In 1999, Gross Domestic Product amounted to \$59.946 billion.
- Gross National Product represented \$38.220 billion. The difference (\$21.717 billion) represents the "exit" profit alluded to by Tobin.
- Net Federal Transfers amounted to \$8.315 billion, most of which is represented by funds such as Social Security, Medicare and benefits and pensions, toward which the people of Puerto Rico contribute.
- Among the transfers not considered acquired benefits (entitlements) is the National Assistance Plan, representing \$1.087 billion—extremely pale when compared to the profits that leave the island yearly.
- Over 12% of Puerto Rico territory is occupied by military bases.
- The Census for 2000 indicates that approximately 60% of the population lives under the poverty level.
- Over 1 million Puerto Ricans living in Puerto Rico are functionally illiterate.
- Federal law prohibits Puerto Rico from developing trade agreements with other countries and Puerto Rico is forced to buy U.S. products at prices that far exceed those in the U.S.

And so on. . . .

Today, the United States remains in violation of its constitution and numerous international laws regarding Puerto Rico's right to self-determination and freedom from colonial rule. These laws include: the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1514 (xv); The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UNGA 2200A[xxi]); and many other internationally recognized conventions, resolutions and accords.¹⁰ And still the U.S. Supreme Court rhetorically affirms the peremptory nature of international law as "part of our law." Former Chief Justice of Puerto Rico's Supreme Court, José Trias Monge, stated the situation clearly and precisely when he remarked that "any change in the terms of association have been degrading."¹¹

On August 15, 1998, the United Nations Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples issued its Special Committee decision concerning Puerto Rico under UN Res. 1514(xv) and decided to keep the question of Puerto Rico under UN review. In November 2000, an international panel of private jurists from five continents convened an International Tribunal on the U.S. violations of human rights in Puerto Rico and Vieques. The Tribunal found the United States guilty on the nine-count indictment. Meanwhile, the island municipality of Vieques continues to be bombed by the U.S. Navy; this, despite a referendum where approximately 70% of the population on Vieques voted for an immediate cease and leave alternative to the U.S. Navy. The people of Puerto Rico receive nothing from the military presence. On the other hand, the Navy draws \$80 million from its NATO allies for allowing them to train in Vieques. The Navy has also responded to the people's efforts by offering money to the fishermen and a few jobs, home appliances, and several services to the population of Vieques. Most recently the Navy has bought air time on different radio stations with the hope of changing public opinion. A long and ugly history precedes the events since the Navy's bombing death of David Sanes on April 19, 1999; a long history of persecution, deaths, rape, and intimidation.

Presently, the United States Department of Justice, through the FBI, continues to release millions of pages of illegal files that the Bureau kept of Puerto Rican independentistas throughout the twentieth century. The files (*las carpetas*) reveal the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)'s leading role in the fabrication of cases, disruption of legal activities, and infiltration of legal groups with the intent to disrupt and destroy them and, as such, undermine the independence movement. The FBI's counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO) continues in Puerto Rico. I and many others are clear that such was the case with my arrest and conviction.

"But the people of Puerto Rico never vote for independence," we so often hear. First, self-determination and sovereignty are not matters of authorization awaiting congressional blessing. And furthermore, the terror of colonial rule might well be expressed by [Marxist philosopher] Herbert Marcuse's words:

This loss of freedom is not experienced as the work of some hostile and foreign force; some relinquish their liberty to self-imposed rationalization. The point is that the appa-

ratus, to which so many have adjusted, is presented as so overpowering that protest and liberation appear not only hopeless but irrational.¹²

Clearly, the challenge for all of us is a pedagogical project, one whose resolution requires our sincerest commitment to social justice, to caring. But caring is born of love and of hope, not hate. And furthermore, to really care I must return to that solitude, to the tearing-away imposed by my arrest, arraignment, trial, conviction and imprisonment. I became the object of a process that I observed with great estrangement—forced to face the pain of the baptismal fire that would strengthen me not by the breadth of words or utterances but by the depth and humility of being a stranger, to it all and to myself. And so I share the following reflections because the most revolutionary aspect of liberation is not the substitution of political arrangements, but rather the transformation of our own humanity and our capacity to see ourselves in the enemy and the contributions that such a transformation can make to a more just and humanized polity.

THE PASSAGE

We walked into a crowded room. The back wall was lined with tables full of refreshments and a variety of breads and cookies. As the people continued to enter, my wife, one of our lawyers and two of our closest friends and I made our way to the front of the conference room. Taking off my jacket, I looked about and noticed a room filled to capacity with many others lining the walls standing, waiting to hear what I had to say. Yet the same strange feeling that had forced itself upon me since my arrest grew exponentially throughout the trial. Here we were again, like so many other times before, capacity-filled rooms and auditoriums brimming with solidarity and yet I felt so alone. I was learning so much more than I could express. As we dialogued in that room the evening before the verdict I found myself reaching out, hoping to find refuge from my sense of solitude in the expressions and presence of others. Was I using them as a crutch against my understanding? As I spoke, the audience seemed further away and at the same time I also felt so much closer to them. There were hugs and words of support. Some cried as if anticipating a tragedy. Others smiled as they expressed warmth and hope. I reminded them that those of us who struggle for Puerto Rico's liberation have never won a trial.

I slept well that night. Yet, at one point I awoke and, turning to look at my wife who was sound asleep, I passed my hand over her face and hair. I spoke to her of my love for her, our children, family and people. Thanking her for her love, I reminded her that she too was my strength in so many ways.

The following morning was cold, Chicago cold, in March. DePaul University, where I had been a professor until 1995, granted the defense team a room at the DePaul Center some three blocks from the Federal Building. The room was furnished with a variety of comfortable sofas, chairs, tables and a couple desks. It was

a quiet place, but by no means empty. All present awaited with a nervous silence, nervous smiles and a general sense of tempered anxiety. There were students, professors, a few journalists, religious leaders from the community and our legal team. I spent the day dialoguing with my wife, our lawyers, Jed and Linda, and the others. That sense that I was being pulled away kept haunting me. And yet I found myself trying to make others laugh. Maybe it was my attempt to shake off the impending solitude. Seeking refuge from myself, I sat next to my wife on one of the sofas and rested my head on her shoulder. Again, I felt so far and yet closer in some strange way; closer to everyone. At about 3:20 PM, someone entered the room and spoke, "They've reached a verdict."

My wife and I looked at one another. Linda and Jed looked at me and I remarked, "this is but another beginning." Jed put out his arm over my shoulder. The entire room emptied as we walked those extremely cold blocks to the Dirksen Federal Building. I remember taking deep breaths of cold air, fresh cold air, and absorbing as many sights as I could. These would be my last breaths of fresh air for a long time.

Entering the 21st floor of the building, we made our way into the courtroom. As with the trial, the room was completely filled. Many wore buttons and patches of the Puerto Rican flag. The feds had a large contingent of marshals and FBI agents present. I sat with my wife until the court was brought to order. Called to order, the judge entered. I looked at the people and signaled for them to relax and smile. One of the marshals noticed my gestures to the supporters and smiled to himself, nodding approvingly. I tipped my head to him as if to acknowledge.

Called for by the judge, the jury entered. That feeling embraced me, squeezing me inside out. Linda held my hand. Jed placed his hand on my shoulder. "Yes we have," answered the jury to the judge's question. "We find the defendant guilty as charged." The judge looked at me. We exchanged a look that spoke a thousand words: "I know that you know what happened here, but you are incarcerated by the rules even if applied unjustly," was my look. I wasn't angry. This wasn't the first time in our history. The judge recessed the court for about twenty minutes. I was ordered to remain in the courtroom. Embracing my wife, I tried to speak words of hope as she cried. Or was I doing this for me? Her pain scorched my heart. The faces of many grew teary-eyed. The press hurried about. One journalist said, "This is terrible. How could they convict with no real evidence? This is wrong." I looked at the journalist and responded, "Wrong? Colonialism is wrong. Don't write about me, learn from this and search for the right in the wrong that this government has imposed as a colonial ruler in my country." Looking at all those sad faces I smiled and, holding my wife's hand, I spoke to those present. "Do not cry for me nor for our people. This cannot be all that. Let the pain be a wake-up call. This is all but a reminder of our responsibility to educate and continue to forge our right to be free."

Remanded into the custody of the U.S. Marshals and the Federal Bureau of Prisons, I was swiftly and abruptly separated from everyone. Five or six marshals took

me by the arms and surrounded me, leading me to another door at the side of the courtroom. Before entering I was ordered to give my wife all personal belongings (watch, necklace, money, ring). Swept away, we looked at each other in between the wall of marshals that cuffed me. Within three minutes I had been stripped naked and searched. Ordered to put on a jumpsuit, I was taken into a room some four by five feet and locked in. There I was. That feeling gestating, waiting and foreboding finally reared up its head. Steel surrounded me. I could hear no sounds other than my breathing and my own movement, other than my voice. It was cold. All they gave me was a jumpsuit and slippers. The handcuffs were tight, my arms numbed by the tension of having been handcuffed from behind. I felt like the pain would suffocate me. It was heart-wrenching. I couldn't move. There were no windows, no chairs. "Where is everyone?" I thought. Would this mean anything to anyone? Why should anyone care? My heart beat rapidly. My body was sweaty despite the cold room. For not subscribing to the U.S. government agency's plan, I was punished. Integrity, honor, commitment, dignity are all good values, but only when they serve those that wish to define these according to their interests.

Within a few hours I was escorted in a van to the Metropolitan Correctional Center (MCC-Chicago), a federal administrative detention center (maximum security). The trip between the federal building and the MCC was short and strange. There were two cars escorting the van and one in the back. The journey was marked by lights and sirens, as if announcing that someone dangerous was coming through.

Once at the MCC, I heard guards and others commenting on my conviction. The trial was of a rather high-profile nature. Again I was strip-searched and issued another orange jumpsuit. The attending officers looked at one another. One of them remarked, "So you're Solís Jordan. I've heard a lot about you. It's been all good." My only response was, "and so here I am." I was taken into a holding room with other prisoners. This was my first contact with other prisoners. I remember all of the generalizations and biases we are brought up with about prison and persons in prison. I looked at them cautiously. They were reluctant to respond by looking back. In fact, they avoided me. They gestured at one another as they looked at my hands. I had been handcuffed with a "blackbox." This is a restraining device used on those the government considers dangerous. So their looks of apprehension were, I was later told, more like concern for themselves in my presence. I thought, "Wow, this is crazy."

Suddenly, I was removed from the room and taken to another room. I was left alone in this room. The other prisoners could see me from across the hallway. Again I waited for hours. After that time, a few guards ordered me to strip and put on a green jumpsuit. Having changed and again handcuffed, I was escorted in an elevator to another floor. As I exited the elevator I felt the cold. It was dark. Everything was painted gray. The ceiling was low and pipes ran along its sides. The lighting was minimal. The only clear light was at the officer's station. There were three steel gates and a steel door that led to the cell block. All I could see were the ominous

locking doors of raw, cold steel. The doors had narrow slits that passed for windows to the hallway. I saw no faces. I heard the cries of prisoners coming from what seemed like two cells. They yelled and cursed at one another violently. These were the expressions of outrage fallen into the depths of what seemed like a madness brought on by the isolation, the sensory deprivation. I was taken to a corner cell flanked by the two cells where the prisoners considered as lunatics by the guards lived. Later I would be told that my placement in that cell was deliberate. And so I entered my cell, an eight-by-eight-foot space of walls painted white, steel bed and toilet, penetrating lights left on for days and a cold that produced vapor when I exhaled. I thought to myself, "My God, just last night I was with so many people, talking, eating, sharing so much energy—and now. . . ."

My mind continued to rush. Within a few minutes of being in the cell a guard passed by and said, "Machetero, right? Or is it FALN?" The *Macheteros* are a clandestine armed organization and FALN (*Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional*) were another. I nodded and responded "No, *puertorriqueño*." "Well, here you go, Mr. Puerto Rico," expressed the guard sarcastically as he looked in the cell through the slit in the door. Silence settled in. I looked around. The only signs of life were the scratch marks left by others who had been here before. The most legible was left next to the bed and read, "God help me, I'm losing it." Yet it had been blackened by paint not allowing even diffused natural light to enter. The only sounds I could hear were those of the "lunatics" yelling and making weird noises at one another, the blowing of the cold air coming in through the air conditioning vent, the guard's keys and my own heart and breathing. I was alone. Would that be enough?

The light bounced off the walls, piercing my eyes. The walls seemed to close in, suffocating my mind. Powerlessness played with me. I'd never been locked up or in anything. I always had the option to move about—not this time. Being locked up in a segregation unit, the "hole" as it is referred to, is shocking. I was in the cell twenty-three hours per day, every day. That thing, that feeling kept slapping me about. The aloneness, the solitude had been shaking me as if trying to assist me to anticipate for days, for months, what was to come. Still, I resisted and reached out, crying painfully for the ones I loved, for my people, for the right. After hours of mental games that rushed through me with maddening speed I thought, "Okay, they'll realize the injustice and call me out soon." But no. Why did I insist on this? After all, wasn't it I who told people about the history of persecution? It was my turn. No one here but me. I was alone. Was that enough?

I couldn't think. The "lunatics" spent their days and nights screaming like animals, making noises, cussing at one another, threatening all with death, and defecating and urinating in their cells. But this was my first night. "They're going to drive me crazy," I thought. No sooner did I think this than I discovered myself assuming a lotus position on the bed. I began to meditate. During my meditation I found myself struggling to block out the madness of the noises from those two. It seemed somehow worse when they would remain silent for a few minutes and then resume. The abruptness would test anyone's nerves. I fell slowly into a deep medita-

tion. Rather than blocking the "lunatics" out, I absorbed their noise until it became part of the silence. After some time, I was distracted by a guard pounding on the door. He looked inside and forcefully asked, "Are you okay? You haven't moved for hours." Smiling at the guard, I said, "I can't go outside, so I'll go inside." Raising his eyebrows, the guard uttered passingly, "Whatever," and left. The aloneness had washed all over me during the meditation. It was like a baptism, a rite of passage, a leap into a radically new sense of time, space and movement.

I stood up to sip some water from the faucet. The floor was freezing. The cell smelled old, cold and wasted. I did some push-ups in an attempt to warm my body. Doing so, I realized that there were things I could do despite the limitations to counter the impositions. Turning over to do some abdominal exercises, I noticed a small strip of paper in the far corner of the floor under the bed. There, too, was a piece of pencil, at best two inches in length. This was it, my opportunity to write something, anything. What would it be? On the slip of paper I wrote the Serenity Prayer: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I can't change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." With a fingertip of toothpaste I stuck the message to the wall. Reflecting upon it became a daily exercise. I was alone. Was this enough? Loneliness is one thing, solitude or being alone, another.

I couldn't change the cell, the prison itself, but I could [change myself]. The wisdom to know the difference between what we can and cannot change is nothing less than our capacity to struggle. That which drives us to accomplish anything is also the limit to what will be. And so I learned to listen to the silence, to touch and be touched by emptiness, to dialogue with myself. Little by little this made every subsequent encounter with another nothing less than unique.

How capable are we of dialogue when so often it is tempered by the cluttered existence of things, assumptions and movement with little time dedicated to really understanding how and why we forge tomorrows? Paulo Freire spoke abundantly of love and struggle. Dialogue, asserted Freire, is not a tactic, not a turn-taking mechanical back-and-forth, not a description. It is curiosity, struggle, anger, joy. Solitude then is not the absence of dialogue; it is self-reflection, self-critique, a dialogue of one. Our unwillingness to reflect critically yet compassionately on the self, to step back, if you will, from the movement of time and space and our assumptions continues to limit our commitment. We skate about on blades of words and ideas whose cleverness establishes the rationalizations for our own stagnation. Do our anger, rage and indignation become excuses for our arrested state? I recalled [Antonio] Gramsci, [Paulo] Freire, Socrates, Albizu Campos and so many other educators who suffered imprisonment. What made them so great? Their capacity to love and understand the power of struggle as a most human expression of love.

When we are torn from our families, friends and people, our bodies, hearts and minds are shocked—profoundly so. The feedback, reaffirmations, the stimuli and sharing that move back and forth from the "I" to others is suddenly silenced. Here we enter into the "I." Is this enough? No, but it is necessary. We read often of how

the political prisoner leaves prison stronger than s/he entered. How? Aloneness, solitude and reflection have washed us with an enriched sense of life, of struggle. This is not due to a loss of freedom but to the realization that the political prisoner is free—s/he has a freedom not contingent upon an imposed convention. Such a position strengthens the sovereignty of freedom to be forged by the sheer power of humanity's love for being more. The greatest contribution I can make as a Puerto Rican political prisoner, as a human being, is to struggle for more life. This, to me, begins with the I and its context, our fight to be free of colonial rule. The solitude, the tearing-away is at once also a reaffirmation of just how close we really are. Being alone has brought me back to being with myself and this is enough. ¡Que viva Puerto Rico libre!

NOTES

1. Ronald Fernandez et al., *The Disenchanted Island: Puerto Rico and the United States in the Twentieth Century* (Greenwood, Conn.: Praeger 1992), 1.
2. *The Disenchanted Island*, 55.
3. *The Disenchanted Island*, 55.
4. Jose Lopez Barralt, *The Policy of the United States towards Its Territories with Special Reference to Puerto Rico* (University of Puerto Rico Press, 1999), 235–36.
5. *The Disenchanted Island*, 180.
6. *The Disenchanted Island*, 180.
7. Richard Thornburg, "On promoting a referendum with regards to the political status of Puerto Rico," 102nd Congress, 1st Session. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, United States Congressional Record (February 1991), 7.
8. José Catala Oliveras, "Sobre la economía de Puerto Rico," *El Nuevo Día* (October 21, 2000), 18.
9. James Tobin et al., *Welfare Programs: An Economic Appraisal* (A & I Press, 1976).
10. Editor's note: For full text of United Nations documents, see www.un.org/documents.
11. José Trias Monge, *Puerto Rico: The Trials of the Oldest Colony* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), 249.
12. Herbert Marcuse, quoted in Solís Jordan, *Public School Reform in Puerto Rico* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1994), 89.

Chapter Twenty-One

Elizam Escobar

Born on May 24, 1948, Elizam Escobar spent the first ten years of his life in Ponce, Puerto Rico, and the following seven years in Lomas Verdes, Bayamón, Puerto Rico. Escobar records that his first "initiation into politics was as a direct 'observer' in 1950, as a young child, during the Nationalist insurrection, where his uncle, Arturo Ortiz was killed."¹ Both his grand-uncle, Eliphaz Escobar, and uncle Ortiz were members of the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico and were politically active in the anticolonial struggle.

In 1965, Escobar entered the University of Puerto Rico. Participating in the Federation of Proindependence University Students, he became involved in the Puerto Rican decolonization struggle. Under Juan Antonio Corretjer and George Fromm, Escobar studied Marxist revolutionary thought and then joined the Puerto Rican Socialist League.²

After arriving in New York City in 1970, he finished his philosophy and art studies at New York City College, where he worked as an art teacher in addition to teaching in various community programs. Participating in several socialist and communist organizations and active in the independence movement and the campaign to release Nationalist prisoners, Escobar soon joined the Puerto Rican clandestine movement.³ Elizam Escobar describes the clandestine movement as "a symbolic force capable of invigorating the psychological aspect and self-esteem of a people or a struggle. . . . [It provided] the right to our self-determination and independence, to self-defense and to respond to the repression that existed in those years."⁴

On April 4, 1980, Escobar was arrested with ten other Nationalists in Evanston, Illinois. The eleven Puerto Ricans were tried in state and federal courts. Under state charges, Escobar was sentenced to eight years for seditious conspiracy to commit armed robbery and possession of an unregistered gun. These charges were also filed in the federal case, where the indictment alleged that the defendants "willfully and knowingly combined, conspired, confederated and agreed together with each other to oppose by force the authority of the government of the United States."⁵ Defendants were also accused of being members of the FALN (*Fuerzas Armadas de Libera-*

ción Nacional), an underground organization that engaged in armed actions against military, economic, and government sites, targeting largely in Chicago and New York symbols of U.S. domination over Puerto Rico. Twenty-eight of the bombings occurred in the Northern District of Illinois (none of which resulted in death or injury).

The *independentistas* argued that they were challenging a foreign, colonial power, that the United States had no jurisdiction and could not try them as "Americans," and thus the seditious conspiracy charges were invalid. Escobar and his codefendants declared themselves "combatants in an anti-colonial war of liberation against the U.S. government, which illegally occupies [Puerto Rico]."⁶ They then invoked their prisoner of war (POW) status and international law: UN General Assembly Resolutions and the 1949 Geneva Conventions and 1977 protocols, which prohibit a colonial government from criminalizing anticolonial acts.⁷ The U.S. government refused to acknowledge the *independentistas* as POWs. Although none of the *independentistas* had ever been convicted of a murder or other felony, because of their political beliefs, they were given unusually lengthy sentences and housed and isolated in high-security, special control units.

Escobar was sentenced to sixty-eight years in federal prison. None of the *independentistas* were convicted of any actual bombings, but they were found guilty for their participation in the FALN. After sentencing, Escobar was placed in the Federal Correctional Institution at El Reno, Oklahoma. In federal prison with restricted visitations, he could be visited by his mother only once a year; he was not allowed to be at the bedside of his dying father or attend his funeral in 1991.

On September 10, 1999, President Bill Clinton granted executive clemency to eleven of the *independentistas*, permitting Escobar to return home to Puerto Rico. The clemency, which did not free all *independentistas*,⁸ set conditions that limit the political activities and associations of those released.

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NOTES

1. Carlos Gil, "An Interview with Elizam Escobar," in *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora*, ed. Andres Torres and Jose E. Velazquez (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 232.
2. "Elizam Escobar," *Can't Jail the Spirit: Political Prisoners in the U.S.A., A Collection of Biographies*, 4th ed. (Chicago: Committee to End the Marion Lockdown, 1998), 122.
3. "An Interview with Elizam Escobar," 235. The Nationalist prisoners consisted of Lolita Lebron, Rafael Cancel Miranda, Andres Figueroa Cordero, Irvin Flores, and Oscar Collazo. All five Puerto Rican nationalists were granted executive clemency by President Jimmy Carter in 1978, and were released after over twenty-five years in prison for firing weapons in the House of Representatives and wounding several congressmen.
4. "An Interview with Elizam Escobar," 235.
5. Quoted in Jan Susler, "Puerto Rican Political Prisoners," *Radical Philosophy Review* 3, no. 1 (January 2000): 29.
6. "An Interview with Elizam Escobar," 237.
7. Jan Susler, "Today's Puerto Rican Political Prisoners/Prisoners of War," in *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora*, 147. Cites General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV), December 12, 1960; General Assembly Resolution 2621 (XXV), October 12, 1970; General Assembly Resolution 3103, December 12, 1973; Geneva Conventions of 1949; and the Additional Protocols (I and II), June 8, 1977.
8. Among those still incarcerated are Juan Segarra Palmer (who received a shortened sentence through clemency); Antonio Camacho Negrón (who was returned to prison for refusing to obey parole restrictions); Oscar López-Rivera (serving a fifty-five-year sentence, he rejected Clinton's offer to spend another ten years prior to release); Carlos Alberto Torres (serving a seventy-eight-year sentence); José Solís Jordan (serving a fifty-one-month sentence); and Haydee Beltrán (sentenced to life in prison). See "Puerto Rican Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War Released: ¡Que Viva Puerto Rico Libre!" www.prisonactivist.org/quesalga/turningtide.html (9 July 2002), originally published in *Turning the Tide: Journal of Anti-Racist Action, Research & Education* 12, no. 3 (Fall 1999); and "Faltan 6 Freedom Campaign," *Prolibertad*, www.prolibertad.org/Faltan6.htm (23 June 2002).

Art of Liberation: A Vision of Freedom

The political is found in the least likely of places, covered by multiple layers of ideological counterfeiting and acculturation. Our daily lives, our dreams, love, death, and even our bodies are all spheres of "invisible" yet intense political and human dramas that take place behind the "visible" political struggle. This inner struggle is, above all, more painful and more real. For it is from *inside* that we must decide our real needs, both material and spiritual. Art of liberation springs from this perspective, recognizing the power of the imagination's struggle. Throughout history, the imagination's struggle against prohibitions based on fear and ignorance has been one of the leading political processes that pushes forward the liberation of the human spirit by rescuing and creating new territories of freedom.

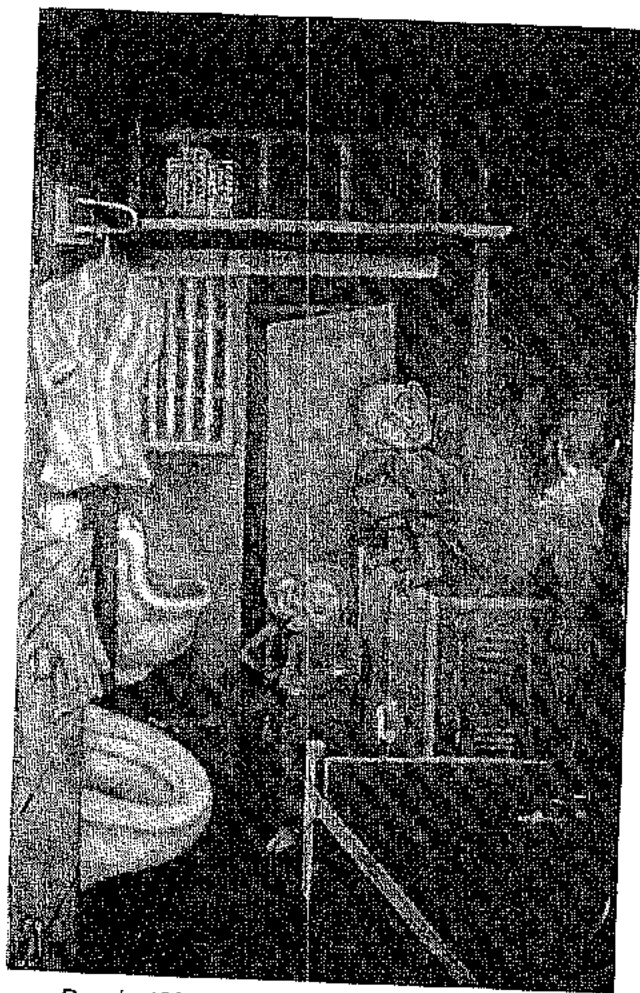
I have been active in the struggle for Puerto Rican national liberation since the 1960s. From the socialist-Marxist perspective, I have simultaneously engaged in political-direct¹ as well as art/cultural work in support of this struggle, but not always with the same intensity or understanding.

In my "first period" I separated "personal" work—my paintings—from more "public" works—political illustrations, propaganda, caricatures, etc. Both activities were done under the dictates of my ideological assumptions. Nevertheless, there were always elements that would completely or relatively escape the dictates of my "ideology." Thematic elements drawn from my particular experiences exposed me to conflicts between what was supposed to be and what actually was, creating tensions that were contained by generic images (political monsters, doubts repressed by ideology, etc.). Formal elements, devalued by socialist realism and other "realist" aesthetics also escaped.

The "second period" began when I moved from Puerto Rico to New York, and was defined by an almost total exclusion of painting due to the demands of my job (schoolteacher), my political-direct work, and my mixed feelings about art. I was under the influence of a politics of "art is useless unless it is for direct propaganda purposes." My work was limited almost exclusively to political caricatures for the party publications. (Not a bad thing.)

In my "third period," I made an almost about-face toward "personal" painting, but this time working as a "professional" artist for different cultural institutions, where I combined teaching art with learning other art techniques. At that point, I was seriously dealing with the fundamental question of the relative autonomy and the specificity of the theory and praxis of art (i.e., that art has its own "rules" within a space that is its own but always in relation to all other levels or spheres of "reality," so to speak), not out of an academic or abstract drive but as a result of an accumulation of experiences. Both my political and artistic commitment were more intense than ever.

In 1980, I was arrested, together with ten other Puerto Rican *independentistas*,



Desvelo, 1990, acríoleo on canvas, 72 × 43 inches.

and accused of seditious conspiracy and participation in the Puerto Rican armed clandestine movement for national liberation. Since then I have been in prison. Here, my "fourth period" is taking place, and it is from the perspective of these experiences that I consider the visionary role of the artist.

THE STRUCTURES OF SIMULATION

We live in societies divided into social classes, where there is no true consensus, only the fictitious and spurious consensus determined by the ruling classes. Electoral



Extended Vacation, 1994, acríoleo and gesso on collage photocopies on wood, 16 × 17.75 inches.

processes are national epics manipulated in the name of the people to legitimize social control and coercion. To resolve these contradictions we must assume the class struggle in all its diverse forms and confront the questions of Power. Only then will the immense majority of excluded, oppressed, and exploited obtain the real power. But we cannot wait for the day when the majority will rule in order to bring forward the structures needed for building a free, just, egalitarian, and non-classist society. We must build within the ruins and the hostilities of present conditions by creating transitional alternatives now. We must build socioeconomic, political, and cultural structures that are controlled by those struggling for change and the communities they serve. These structures, "schools" for discussing all these problems, will put into practice the notion that only by confronting the reality of subjection can we begin to be free to create an art of liberation that frees people from the illusions perpetrated by dominant culture.

The contemporary State creates structures of simulation. These are indispensable

both to cover the real nature of the system and to show tolerance and acceptance for dissidents. Furthermore, they not only create their own structures, but they obligate us to create our own.

For example, the ruling classes create the simulation of cultural democracy (the illusion of real political power, equal opportunity and the freedom of difference in order to make others believe that they have a real participation in the cultural space) through the mass culture and the media. They need "false enemies" to wage relatively inoffensive and limited "cultural wars" that end up strengthening the social body's health.² One example is what happened to the spontaneous street graffiti expression: from symbolic exchange it became another commodity with status exchange value. In Puerto Rico under colonialism, popular art is institutionalized and becomes a folkloric domestication of the people's unconscious. Some of the Left's culture of resistance has been depoliticized by obligating artists to make false choices between a sort of one-dimensional domesticated "nationalist art" and mass culture. This way, artists either turn their "criticism" against an abstract enemy or they wear themselves out by contributing an "original" aesthetic to the status quo (but always in the name of "Puerto Ricanness") because they fear the worst evil, that of U.S. statehood—to the benefit of the colonial bourgeois lackeys. Part of the Puerto Rican independence movement reproduces itself as a simulation model through this "cultural nationalism." At the same time, artists are domesticated by continuous government subsidies, status, fame, wealth, and by aspiring to national titles, while those who persist to the contrary, whose politics are to unveil the whole system of simulation are censored even by some orthodox Left publications who want to reduce the debates to their own political good, that is, they won't allow dissent within the dissent. Paradoxically, art (as the power of imagination), the only "true" simulation, is the one that can lead us to the *understanding* (not necessarily to the resolution) of that other "false" simulation.

THE CULTURE OF FEAR

But in order to liberate art from the nets of political power, we, the artists, must first liberate ourselves from the nets of the *culture of fear*, and the inferiority/superiority complex we have in our dealings at the political-direct level. If art is to become a force for social change it must take its strength from the *politics of art*, art's own way of affecting both the world and the political-direct. It must take strength from that specific manner in which our praxis expresses the aspirations of the people, the political collective unconscious, the contradictions, etc., through a symbolic language. But the *politics of art* will happen only if the power of the imagination is able to create a symbolic relationship between those who participate, the artwork, and the concrete world; and then always understanding the work of art's sovereignty (or relative autonomy) in relation to concrete reality.

What is important is not the didactic pretension that we possess the solutions, but the idiosyncratic ways in which works of art can bring out the real aspects of

the human condition in particular and specific contexts or experiences. Art is, from this perspective, an encounter where we have the possibility for a symbolic, political, and real exchange. Since our forms are also used to deliberately appeal to people for political-direct goals, it is logical that at some point these strategies become dominant and in conflict with the internal problems (the how) of art. If we can understand how the political affects and shapes everything else, and the difference between the specific practices of art and the practices of the political-direct, then the artist would be clearer on how to decide his/her strategies, sources, themes, aesthetics, etc. When it comes to the theory and praxis of art, the *political* is beyond any "political (direct) issues."

Most U.S. "Political Art," as I have come to understand it, wants to present political-direct issues through images, in a clear and communicative form, irrespective of the medium, the style, or the aesthetic selection. It presupposes that one can predict the kind of political effect a work of art is going to have. Thus the important thing is the message. This emphasis on the message is akin to Marshall McLuhan's naive optimism "the medium is the message," and finds its extreme in the inversion of McLuhan's dictum: "The message is the message." Both are founded in the arbitrariness of the sign, which artificially separates and reunites everything in terms of a signifier (in this case, the medium) and a signified (here, the message). The political and the symbolic are de-politicized by the imposition of a code that comes directly from ideology, since as Jean Baudrillard argues, "every attempt to surpass the political economy of the sign that takes its support from one of its constituent elements is condemned to reproduce its arbitrary character."³

In this way the participants are excluded from creating meanings other than those already transmitted by the message since once the signal is sent either you accept it or reject it. There is no need to search for more. In this respect the art of the message shares common ground with the *formal theory of communication*⁴ which goes like this: transmitter (encoder)—message—receiver (decoder). One speaks, the other doesn't. The message is assumed to contain information that is legible and univocal, based on a pre-established and rationalized code composed of signs. Two terms are artificially reunited by an objectified content called message. The formula has a formal coherence that assures it as the only *possible* schema for communication, since a code names everything in terms of itself and anything else that is not "designed" or "adapted" to the agency of the code cannot be utilized since it won't work in this schema. The problem then is that this structure denies the ambivalence of exchange; the reciprocity or antagonism between two distinct interlocutors. As soon as ambivalence shows up the structure collapses, since there is no code for ambivalence, and without code no more encoder, no more decoder.

I am not saying that U.S. "Political Art" is equal to this over-obsession with "communication," but that it is constricted to the code if its intentions are mainly to present a message. Thus, anything that is not in the sign form is ambivalent and it is from ambivalence (i.e. the impossibility of distinguishing respective separated terms and to positivize them as such) that any symbolic exchange (allusions through images, discourse, objects, etc.) can emerge. On the other hand, this

impasse is, of course, disturbing, since we cannot absolutely do away with the significant code.

The ironic dilemma is that we have to make use of this code though we realize that it reduces and abstracts the irreducible experience of that which we call "liberation" (or "freedom," "desires," "needs," etc.). It is the all-too-familiar situation where words (like "liberation," "political," "freedom of expression") take command over the real concrete experience and are used to legitimize and justify a practice or a state of things. There is a brutal difference between "freedom" as exchange-sign-value or slogan of ideologies and abstractions, and the real freedom of experience—one that is as necessary as it is terrible. Even under extreme repression, individual freedom is unavoidable as we must keep on exercising our decisions and responsibilities. Here again art comes to the rescue, because it has the inventive power and wit to deride, deceive, and betray censorship as well as self-censorship.

But how one is going to affect others is another matter, since it is almost impossible to know how an artwork will be taken. The effect is always diverse, contingent, and unpredictable. Whether this ambivalence is richer than a clear-cut message is for others to decide. But the important thing is that an artist must reestablish an element of confidence through his/her intentions of being as honest as possible and as consistent in his/her views as convictions allow. In this sense a "solitary voice" is as strong as a collective one.

Works of art are provocations, but in order for an artist to be provocative she/he first has to have true vocation, that is, true dedication to her/his art and to those who have been reduced to invisibility. It is from there that art cannot only obtain relevancy but also can transcend its immediate references.

The political aspect of art is to confront all of reality, without ideological permissions and through its own means. In order to discover our real needs we must be incredulous about what we are told and why we believe it. We must re-find the internal relationship between human desires and aspirations and human necessity, but in a new way. We must put into question any philosophical system or form of knowledge that claims to be the only and absolute truth. To that Marxist thought of freedom ("freedom is the knowledge [or recognition] of necessity") I add a concept of art: *art is the necessity of freedom*.

ART, PRISON, AND LIBERATION

Twenty-five centuries ago, when Socrates was incarcerated, he wrote his first and only poems.⁵ Ever after, the experience has been repeated. In prison, many non-artists, men and women of action and thought who never saw art or poetry as important or "useful," have engaged in some sort of creative expression. Art has come through prison. But also through art, prison has come to the outside; many poets, writers, and painters have had some essential experiences in prisons or other places of internment, and many others have become writers or artists in prison. Certainly,

art usually comes to the rescue of those who have to confront these conditions at one point in their lives, people who otherwise may never have done much or anything for the defense or estimation of art. Art demands certain introspection, solitude, and abandonment; and certain confrontation with the self and death; that is, themes that are usually repugnant to "revolutionaries" and "practical" people unless it has to do with heroism or the glorification of a personality. Therefore, it is no surprise that adversity and forced solitude are able to liberate that "obscure" region of the imagination.

In prison life, there is—consciously or not—a constant and extreme interaction between the pleasure principle and the reality principle (for example, the realization that in politics as in love one must learn how to wait), much sublimation/desublimation, daydreaming, hope/cynicism, disillusionment, anger, unreality, skepticism, repression, censorship, and hypocrisy. All this shapes one's life and art. We are penetrated as much by the means of communication as people on the outside; sometimes more, because of our encloistering and lack of direct outside contact. This combination of suppression and diversion keeps prisoners as apathetic consumers and participants in a vicious circle. The human condition, in a state of extreme control and intensity, distorted to the most complete absurdity: either life is only a simulacrum (the art of the living death) or only through simulation are you able to survive.

There are exceptions, but the final balance is dehumanization, a waste of human lives. Cheap slave labor, and the continuation of criminal activity through other means and under different circumstances, are what characterize the "rehabilitation shop" of a society that is itself in need of radical transformation. The decadence of this society is displayed in its prisons through a spectacle of extreme collective madness. To "liberate" this experience through art is a responsibility to others.

Prison has reconfirmed to me the great importance of art in our lives because the deep reflection and the intense involvement that art requires help us to better understand the real necessities and the true meanings of freedom, for the individual as well as the collective. And to fight for that truth, to defend that truth, art also becomes a weapon. A weapon not only because one can create meaning for one's own existence or inspire others to continue the struggle. But simply because one can understand better the intrinsic relationship between the visions coming through the praxis of art and those unveiled aspects of the too-much-rationalized and arbitrary aspects of our ideologies, as well as our daily mechanical rituals and common nonsense. My own experience of repression expressed through art can relate to other general human experiences of repression and exclusion better than, let's say, if I start to think through my "ideological eyes." Art must spring from real life.

If art becomes theoretical discourse, that is also a necessary weapon. To theorize art directly from the praxis of art is a necessity in opposition to those who would like to keep art as inoffensive "aesthetics" or as mere echoes of the political-direct. And since some people would like to reduce art to a slogan of metaphysical propo-

tions, one must always make the distinction between the art of propaganda, publicity, or design; and art as an act of liberation. The fundamental distinction is that an art of liberation can neither be a model nor a specific aesthetic or style. It is a concept and an attitude with no specific formulations, only that it must be open to any strategy that can help liberate art (and through art, people) from the dictatorship of the logic, politics, and metaphysics of the sign.

ART OF LIBERATION

To me, art is the best argument for talking about freedom and about necessity when one does not separate the body from the spirit. In my experience I have learned more about politics through art than through politics. And by art here I mean all the arts and their discourses—and all the ways in which the symbolic and the power of the imagination influence the political—direct and help us to better understand social reality.

I do not express this with blind enthusiasm. I have come to suspect all those who depend on and are moved only by enthusiasm. So when I say that I believe in the fundamental role of art in life—to provoke, to provide a critical outlook, a paradoxical reassurance of our common humanity—I am not implying that this is a universal, shared judgment. Nor am I saying that art should conquer the world. It is enough for me to be conquered by art and to be able to let it go wherever it must go. So my bet on art is my bet on life. It is my bet on the possibility of linkage between the political struggle and the struggle for survival in a hostile environment. I am not referring merely to prison per se, but to all those environments created by the prison of social systems, in the name of the people and freedom, as well as by the prison of "communication." Political awareness makes us confront all that reality. It makes us both assault the status quo and critically inspect ourselves.

Art is an extension of life, and if you have artists whose politics are insubornable, committed, and uncompromised, then they become as strengthening and inspiring to others, artists and non-artists, as art is to life.

NOTES

Originally published in *Reimaging America: The Arts of Social Change*, ed. Mark O'Brien and Craig Little (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1990), 86–94.

1. The political is ubiquitous in today's world, but its more pure form is when you engage directly in the struggles for change and power. . . .

2. See Roger Bartra, *Las redes imaginarias del poder político* (Mexico: Ediciones Era, 1981).

3. Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (St. Louis: Telos, 1981), 160.

Editor's note: Marshall McLuhan, "The Medium Is the Message," in *Media Studies*, ed. Paul Morris et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 1996), 30–34.

4. Based on Roman Jacobsen and criticized by Baudrillard.

5. Editor's note: Socrates' *The Crito* contains his prison writings.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Standing Deer

Standing Deer (Robert Hugh Wilson) was born in Oklahoma in 1923. The son of an Oneida mother from Wisconsin and Choctaw father from southwestern Oklahoma, he learned to speak both Choctaw and Oneida, the languages spoken by his paternal and maternal grandmothers, respectively, before he spoke English. However, within the first years of his life, his parents forbade him and his two siblings from speaking any of their native languages and discussing their grandparents or the clans that were their heritage. By the age of six, Standing Deer, a light-skinned young boy living in a white neighborhood, attending white schools in Oklahoma City, learned to disassociate himself and his two siblings from other Native Americans around him and to think of himself as "white" and "American," not "Indian." When any of the students in his school called him an Indian, he fought them—following his father's instructions—until they agreed to call him American. Yet, he maintained, he did not completely internalize the shame and self-hatred of his parents. Between the ages of twelve and seventeen he ran away from home several times, often to live with his father's and his mother's families and other Native Americans. But he no longer remembered the Oneida and Choctaw languages and customs of his very early childhood and so remained an outsider.

As a young adult, Wilson was arrested several times for a number of minor offenses and received his first prison sentence in 1963: ten years for interstate trafficking of counterfeit money. After his release in 1970, he was sentenced to another twenty-five years in the state penitentiary in Oklahoma for armed robbery and larceny involving the theft of an automobile. During that sentence, he spent a year in solitary confinement for his involvement in a prison riot on July 27, 1973.¹ He escaped on April 29, 1975, when he hijacked a bus transporting him to another prison and remained underground until police apprehended him in Chicago on April 6, 1976. At that time, Robert Wilson was a notorious and skilled bank robber, and his prison records reflect that prison and state officials considered him dangerous (he routinely assaulted officers who tried to apprehend him).²

After his arrest in Chicago, Wilson faced indictments on seven felony charges in

the western and midwestern United States, including a June 3, 1975, bank robbery in Oklahoma City that resulted in a near-fatal shooting of a police officer. Wilson faced up to seven life sentences for interstate transportation of stolen jewelry and bank robberies. Along with an accomplice, Steven Berry, he was sent to the United States Penitentiary super-maximum-security prison in Marion, Illinois. While in the Marion prison, Wilson suffered from degenerative disc disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. In March of 1978, he was in the prison hospital under treatment for his chronic back problems when, according to Wilson, Dr. J. Plank at the hospital approached him to help the chief correctional officer, Max Carey, monitor Leonard Peltier. A Lakota and member of the American Indian Movement (AIM) also imprisoned at Marion, Peltier was then and remains now one of the most prominent political prisoners in the United States.³ Wilson refused, and Plank returned him to solitary confinement. On May 5, the increasing degeneration of his back culminated in Wilson falling in the shower and being unable to force himself upright. Within days, Carey visited him, offering medical treatment in exchange for his cooperation against Peltier.

On May 17, 1978, according to Wilson's account, Carey entered his hospital room with a well-dressed white man who claimed that he could obtain medical treatment and parole for Wilson if he would help "neutralize" Leonard Peltier.⁴ Further discussion elicited the intent behind Peltier's "neutralization": Wilson would befriend Peltier through the prison's Native American cultural group, convince Peltier that he had the means and materials to help him escape from prison, then prison officials would kill Leonard Peltier during the escape attempt. Wilson would be provided with zip guns, wire cutters, a hacksaw, materials to make dummies, and any other components needed to prove that he could help Peltier escape.

That day proved to be a turning point in the life of Robert Hugh Wilson, who would soon reclaim the name of "Standing Deer" that his grandfather gave him during childhood. Wilson agreed to his role in the plan. Oklahoma authorities dropped the warrants that they held on him and on June 1, they cancelled the pending trial. After his discharge from the hospital, Wilson had his first chance to meet Leonard Peltier, whom he had not previously supported, on July 4, 1978.

In *Coming Home*, an excerpt from a public message that he wrote in 1994, Standing Deer relayed the significance of meeting Peltier: "[That] transformed my life, brought me home to my People, and put me dead in the middle of the political struggle for the survival of my People."⁵ He describes the events of that and the following day as a spiritual and political cleansing and transformation. As he approached Peltier that day, he could sense the love, respect, and commitment Peltier radiated and recognized his scars as piercings and flesh offerings from the Sun Dance (a sacred Lakota ceremony outlawed by U.S. institutions such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Prisons). Wilson confessed his role in the government plot to assassinate Peltier. The next day, Leonard Peltier and another Lakota man escorted Wilson to an empty room in Marion's law library. The other man produced a rope and bandanna that he used to bind and blindfold Peltier in a

chair before he left the room. According to Wilson, Peltier instructed him to barricade the door with a bookcase, then verbally directed him to a fifteen-inch knife hidden in a bookcase. Wilson recalls that as he picked up the knife:

The knife turned into a snake in my hand, and as I stared paralyzed it became the face of the blond, blue-eyed stranger [the unnamed agent who accompanied Carey] who wanted Leonard dead. As I looked into the blue eyes, I saw the face of the man who murdered my grandfathers and grandmothers. I was terrified, but when I looked at Leonard he was smiling, and I could hear his smile and it sounded like a gentle waterfall. I could no longer see through my tears, but I heard the waterfall say, "Do whatever it is you have to do, my Brother." And I fell to the floor and cut his bonds and removed his blindfold and he had tears in his eyes that looked like a rainbow.⁶

The events in the library marked an epiphany for Wilson. He pretended to continue with the assassination plans and joined the prison's Native American culture group. His oratorical and organizational skills quickly led to his promotion to chairperson and spokesperson for the group. Standing Deer became an active and outspoken advocate for prisoners and political prisoners, in particular for their religious, physical, medical, and intellectual and educational rights. Seeking Native American religious rights, medical access for chronically ill patients, and an end to forced labor for elderly inmates, Standing Deer continuously sent letters of protest to prison officials, and supporters and families of prisoners, to challenge what he termed "the dungeon" of "America's gulag." Released in September 2001, he lived with his wife in Houston, Texas. Standing Deer was murdered in his home on January 21, 2003.

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NOTES

Research and draft for this biography were provided by Yvette Koch.

1. The riot caused \$21 million in damages and resulted in the prison burning down. For a detailed list of Standing Deer's prison record, see Peter Matthiessen, *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* (New York: Viking, 1980), 380–88 and 500–3.
2. "Medical Record of Federal Prisoner in Transit: Wilson, Robert H., No. 01499-164, from MCC, Chicago, IL to USP, Marion, IL, 29 October 1976," quoted in Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 354.
3. See the Leonard Peltier biography in this anthology.
4. *Agents of Repression; In the Spirit of Crazy Horse*; and Standing Deer, "Coming Home," 19 September 1994. www.sonic.net/~doretk/archivearch...erican/coming%20homestanding%20deer.html (18 March 2002).
5. "Coming Home."
6. "Coming Home."
7. For more writings by Standing Deer, see "What Is in Your Heart They Cannot Take," *Sonic Net*, February 1998. www.sonic.net/~doretk/Issues/98-04%20%20spr/whatsin.html (16 March 2002); *Can't Jail the Spirit: Political Prisoners in the U.S.*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Committee to End the Marion Lockdown, 1997); and "Prisons, Poverty and Power" in *Cages of Steel: The Politics of Imprisonment in the United States*, ed. Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall (Washington, D.C.: Maisonneuve Press, 1992).

Violence and the State (Abridged)

The violence thing is what really has my head spinning. If violence is "the imposing of a set of conditions on another party without regard to the other's interest, or without sensitivity to their situation" then by that definition, I have been the victim of state-imposed violence all my life and not just the twelve years I have recently spent in prison. . . . In a way, I feel like my education is just beginning because so sheltered have I been that these ideas on violence have not been available in any writings I've been able to get past the censors in these maximum security pigsties I've lived in all these years. Let me say again I haven't read Ward Churchill's paper "Pacifism as Pathology" and I would very much like to.¹ I'm not opposed to violence, but the support for violent action of any kind has always been absent in positions I have read while condemnation has been overwhelming.

I live in this prison where all my information comes out of the mind-destroying, capitalist-promoting, thought-stealing TV, and the brain-washing, propaganda-spewing daily papers. If you could sample the *Tulsa World*, *The Daily Oklahoman* and the *McAlester News-Capital* for thirty days, plus be bombarded with the constant blathering about how [President Ronald] Reagan is a subversive who loves niggers and has packed the U.S. Supreme Court with Communists. So far to the right are these people that it is exhausting just keeping myself reasonably sure what my own beliefs are. I'm enclosing a couple of letters to the editor columns to accent what I mean about the political climate in Oklahoma (as if you didn't know). The guards are another 360° to the right of these newspaper views.

I read with fascination turning to amazement the three paragraphs Mike Ryan devoted to Native Nations on page sixteen.² I, of course, agree that Native Nations exist, that the Dine Nation has a large land base rich in natural resources, that the Dine are poverty-stricken, ill-educated, without jobs, have an outrageously high infant mortality rate, and all the rest of it. And, of course, I agree that this situation must be changed, but I had no idea that American Indians are in a position to cripple North American imperialism. I would have thought that if the Native Nations appeared to be in a position to deprive the United States of crucial resources, the Indians would be stepped on like so many bugs. Neither would they let us do it through their courts since their laws are carefully designed to prevent just such a happening from ever taking place. If there was a violent movement formed, it would consist of about twenty percent FBI agents and undercover Indians; there would probably be no more than five percent of the total Indian population involved in the liberation struggle, and they would be branded the lunatic fringe. Many of our own people would turn against us after Jane Pauley and Bryant Gumble explained to them that we were Communists or worse. Since we are so easily identified by our skin color and appearance, they would, if they felt it necessary, bring into play the ultimate discourager as the prosecutor at [Nelson] Mandela's trial said:

"If any threat to white rule were to arise, the shooting of 5,000 natives by machine gun would provide quiet for a long time." And it would. Mostly because that would be just about the number of us involved. Then it would not be necessary for Euro-American radicals to implement their position as to what they would do to support us, for we would no longer exist.

Just because American Indians can be fit into [Joseph] Stalin's conceptual scheme defining a nation doesn't make us any more unified than the nation of the dominant culture that oppresses us.³ But the State's ability to command discipline and obedience from the worker ants who would be called upon to dispense their violence is so total, and the weapons of destruction available to them are so awesome that unity becomes a moot point for the State. But unity is indispensable to our side, and we have none.

Being around the Indian brothers here in Oklahoma has been an experience. Outside of Ben Carnes and Harry Hall I haven't met a single one who knows anything about the struggle in general or [the American Indian Movement] AIM in particular. Most of the brothers are racists hating whites and Blacks almost equally with a slight edge going to whites. Many of them believe AIM has caused a lot of trouble for our people. If they have any religion it is Christian. Many believe long hair is worn by trouble-makers. They are nearly all anxious to learn what I have to teach them about our struggle, but it is hard because they have been taught to assimilate. Getting along with the white folks is their first priority, and they are timid about expressing their new-found political consciousness to other brothers for fear of ridicule. The "Indian Leaders" in Oklahoma think folks like me and Ben and Harry should be put to death for stirring up "trouble" in the minds of the other Indians. I'm not speaking hyperbole. David Hilligoss knows a lot about how the "Indian Leaders" think about us down here at the prison because Dave has tried in vain to organize some sort of support for us among the Oklahoma Indians.⁴ There is none. I can't even get Indians as verifiers on my application for exemption I want to file to keep my hair from being forcibly cut.

I sit in my cage and listen to my yuppie/buppie news programs on TV and the country seems to be rushing to the right. Then I read my *Guardian* and *Worker's World* and find a world frothing at the mouth for socialist change. I wake up each day in an intellectual vacuum, and I have no way to test reality. I still have sense enough to know the Republicrats offer no solutions with their big, serious presidential election. But isolated as I am, I can't decide if the talk about violence is serious or if it is theoretical and will remain forever so. I know you can't organize a violent response to oppression unless you do it in such tiny cliques that it would almost surely be ineffectual. Because of the secrecy required (in this day and time when children are trained to turn their mothers over to the police for smoking marijuana, and where block wardens are being organized in some big cities to act as "Snitch Central," where members of the community can report the suspicious activities of their neighbors) they would have to remain too remote to develop the "from the masses, to the masses" relationship out of which could germinate the revolutionary

politics necessary for support of violent action. I feel like I'm missing something. I love the idea of violent response to State violence, but I am so afraid that the funerals would mostly be ours and I can't see what it would achieve. I want to read Churchill's paper. Maybe then it will make more sense to me.

If it seems I don't know what I'm talking about it's because I don't. I feel like I'm in a dark room looking at things going on in a room with bright lights but I'm separated from the light-filled room by a sheet partition. I can see all of you as shadows, but can't quite make out what is happening in your room. I wonder if Ward and Mike are looking through their own sheet out onto the sun-filled world and seeing a little more definition than I. I have been around people—when I was in Marion Prison—who knew so much about radical politics that it was easy to get so caught up in the redolence of revolution that I'd forget that in real life on the outside, revolutionaries were actually quite scarce.

People who think as we do are rare and I don't like it. If only there were more of us. You've heard about the National Geographic Society study that was done by the Gallup organization in May? Forty-five percent of Americans are unaware that apartheid is the government policy in South Africa; forty-seven percent are unaware that Israel is the site of conflict between Arabs and Jews; fifty percent are unaware that Nicaragua is the country in which the Sandinistas and contras are in conflict. One American in seven cannot identify the U.S. on a map of the world!!! My next door neighbor thinks Boston, Massachusetts, is in Texas (somewhere down around Houston). I'm not kidding.

Before ya'll think I mean to be the purveyor of doom and gloom, please remember that the thought of violence makes me happier than two dead dogs lying in the sun, but I just believe "the time is not right." Conditions are more than bad enough, but I would like to sit in on a strategy and tactics session and hear just how such a response can be organized and implemented without the police neutralizing our group before we get to first base. I know most of the students and intellectuals who took Huey P. Newton's advice on attacking the enemy in their communities are either dead, in jail or have become militant Republicans. They will let you talk about violence so long as your propaganda and agitation appear to be abstract and idealistic. They will even let you print intellectual discourses about it. It's just doing it that they won't let you do.

NOTES

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1. Editor's note: Ward Churchill's essay is fully titled "Pacifism as Pathology: Notes on an American Pseudopraxis." It appears in the larger volume by Ward Churchill and Mike Ryan, *Pacifism as Pathology: Reflections on the Role of Armed Struggle in North America* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 1998). Churchill first wrote the essay in 1986, arguing for the necessity of violence in strategic revolutionary organizing. While pacifism promises that nonviolence can

transcend the racism and imperialism of state power through purity of purpose, argues Churchill, the universal application of pacifism is counterrevolutionary and defends or reinforces the power apparatuses that it opposes. According to the authors, violence is a necessity for state transformation just as it is a daily reality in the lives of Third World and U.S. minorities who experience the brunt of racialized state violence.

2. *Editor's note:* The author refers to the second of two essays that comprise *Pacifism as Pathology*.

3. *Editor's note:* According to Joseph Stalin, "a nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture." Josef Stalin, *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question* (New York: International Publishers, 1935).

4. *Editor's note:* David Hilligoss, Ph.D., is a speaker on tribal rights, professor emeritus of Native American Studies, University of Illinois, and Native News Service correspondent and producer.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Leonard Peltier

A citizen of the Anishinabe/Lakota Nation, Leonard Peltier was born on the Turtle Mountain reservation in North Dakota in 1944. During his youth, Peltier's community experienced extreme poverty largely due to federal neglect through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Peltier describes a failed attempt to steal heating oil for his house, his first of many run-ins with the law, as an example of the measures that he and community members had to resort to in order to live under harsh conditions. Of his early experiences with non-Native children, shopkeepers, BIA officials/officers, and the police, he comments, "I'm seven or eight by now and beginning to understand the meaning of hate and racism. It seemed as if all white people hated us, and I was beginning to hate just as much."¹

Raised by his Sioux grandmother who only spoke Ojibwa, Peltier did not learn English until he was forced to attend a BIA-run boarding school. For most Native American youths at the time, the only opportunity for education on the reservation was in racist, government-sponsored boarding schools. Largely designed to assimilate Native children, these boarding schools denied students the right to speak in their native language or practice traditional customs and proved a leading cause in the dissolution or loss of Native traditions and culture.²

Leonard Peltier left school at the age of fourteen, moving to Denver, Colorado, to find work. There, he met Dennis Banks, cofounder of the American Indian Movement (AIM). Banks gave political instruction to Peltier, who became his bodyguard. Soon, Peltier, with other young Native Americans, strategized actions to restore value for Native culture and attain economic assistance for poverty-stricken reservations.³

Peltier served in the "Trail of Broken Treaties," AIM's attempt to force the government to fulfill neglected treaties, by occupying the Bureau of Indian Affairs offices in Washington, D.C., in November of 1972. The occupation ended with a verbal agreement between the Nixon administration and AIM members in which the administration promised to fulfill the "Twenty Points" of AIM's grievances and not prosecute any of the AIM members. The demands were never met. Instead, the

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) began its long campaign to destroy AIM through intimidation, arrests, imprisonment, and violence.⁴

Following the Trail of Broken Treaties, Peltier was charged with the attempted murder of an off-duty police officer in Milwaukee. After five months in prison, he was released on bail and fled the state to avoid legal proceedings. While conclusions about Peltier's role in this violent exchange with the Milwaukee police vary, for some, the allegations against Peltier are an example of police harassment and prosecutorial malfeasance stemming from the FBI COINTELPRO and government attempts to imprison or "neutralize" members of AIM.⁵

A fugitive, Peltier joined other AIM activists on the Pine Ridge reservation in North Dakota in the spring of 1973. There tribal authorities, under the direction of tribal president Dick Wilson and the GOONS (Guardians of the Oglala Nation), had terrorized traditional elders and progressive Native Americans and transformed Pine Ridge into a state of siege where police abuse was rampant. The GOONS initiated violence against members of AIM and other traditional Native Americans. AIM had seized the town of Wounded Knee, symbolic site of the 1890 massacre of hundreds of Native Americans, to draw national attention to injustice and repression on the reservation. In early May 1973, satisfied by the government's commitment to discuss past treaties, recognize traditional governments, and investigate police brutality by Dick Wilson's GOONS, AIM left Wounded Knee, and in the two years that followed, the U.S. government proceeded to arrest or imprison over five hundred AIM members. The government and Dick Wilson were not held accountable for any injuries, deaths, or malfeasance despite the under- or uninvestigated numbers of assaults and murders occurring on the Pine Ridge reservation.⁶

In this context, two years later, an FBI shootout at Pine Ridge occurred while Peltier, along with AIM members Bob Robideau and Dino Butler, were protecting citizens on the reservation from unlawful police attacks. Two agents were killed, and three Native American men were charged with the killings. While Peltier's codefendants were acquitted on grounds of self-defense, Peltier, who was tried separately the following year, was sentenced to two life sentences. Upset by the acquittal of the other two defendants, the FBI had revamped their case for Peltier. He had been faced with a changed venue to Fargo, North Dakota, a city known at the time for its animosity toward Native Americans; a new conservative judge; and newly obtained witness testimonies and incriminating evidence.⁷ To incite prejudice against Peltier, the FBI publicly assigned agents to "protect" the judge and jury. The state refused a public trial for "security reasons."⁸

Convicted, Peltier, incarcerated at Leavenworth, has been imprisoned for decades, although the evidence of his guilt is questionable. In 1985, Prosecutor Lynn Crooks retracted his earlier condemnation of Peltier as a "cold-blooded murderer" and admitted that "the government [did not] really know who shot those agents."⁹ Author Peter Matthiessen observes: "Whatever the nature and degree of his participation at Oglala, the ruthless persecution of Leonard Peltier has less to do with his own actions than with the underlying issues of history, racism and economics, in

particular Indian sovereignty claims and growing opposition to massive energy development on treaty lands and the dwindling reservations."¹⁰

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NOTES

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1. Peter Matthiessen, *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 44.
2. Peter Matthiessen, *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse*, 46.
3. Scott Anderson, "The Martyrdom of Leonard Peltier," *Outside Magazine*, July 1995.
4. Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars against Dissent in the United States* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 234.
5. *COINTELPRO Papers*, 235.
6. Rex Weyler, *Blood of the Land* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1992), 96.
7. *COINTELPRO Papers*, 294.
8. (Associated Press). "Indian Is Found Guilty of First Degree Murder in Death of 2 F.B.I. Men," *New York Times*, 19 April 1977, 22.
9. *COINTELPRO Papers*, 298.
10. *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse*, xx.

Inipi: Sweat Lodge

I lie here in my bed this Saturday afternoon, my head propped up on the hard little pillow, my chewed pencil stub poised above the yellow legal pad in my lap, and I redream today's *inipi*, or sweat-lodge ceremony, not wanting to let it go. The *inipi* makes each Saturday morning holy here in otherwise unholy Leavenworth. When I return to my cell after that inward journey in the sweat lodge, I try to relive each moment, reimmersing myself in those higher feelings not only for the pure spiritual pleasure of it but also to search among them for anything of special significance, any specific instructions to me from the Great Mystery. Things come to you in the sweat that you don't even realize at the time, that only later—sometimes years later—you suddenly realize were part of your own instructions, what we call Original Instructions.

I was taught by the Elders that there are three kinds of Original Instructions. There are the Original Instructions for all of humankind, sort of like a Ten Commandments that's true for all human beings. Those kinds of instructions come only through the highest individuals, like Moses or Jesus or Muhammad or White Buffalo Calf Woman. Next there are the Original Instructions for each people, each nation, each tribe. Those come through great spirit-warriors like Crazy Horse or Sitting Bull or Geronimo or Gandhi. Then, third, there are the Original Instructions for each one of us as individuals, for the path our own individual spirit is supposed to follow. This last kind of Original Instructions are most likely to come to you during the *inipi* or other sacred ceremonies.

As I sit here, my whole body feels aglow, warm with inner vibrations. In my mind's eye, I relive all the events leading up to and coming after today's *inipi* ceremony. I can't really take you into the central moments of the sweat with me. What happens in there is intensely personal. You never celebrate, or even speak of, the most important things that happen to you, the deepest and most spiritual things. Those are between you and Wakan Tanka and no one else. To put those into words is to freeze them in space and time, and they should never be frozen that way because they're continually unfolding, changing with and adapting to each passing moment. You can only approach such matters with words, not describe or capture them, just as you can never define or capture the Great Mystery itself with words. Words take you only to the threshold of meaning. Meaning itself is something you have to feel, to experience for yourself. So consider this description simply an approach, an attempt to bring you to the threshold of some of the meanings, the higher meanings, as I see them, of what I experience in the sweat.

Many people are terrified of sweats—and not without some reason. It can get so hot in there when they pour the water on the red glowing stones that, if you're not used to it, you literally reach the end of your tether, of your self-control. In that scalding, flesh-poaching steam, you feel there's absolutely nothing you can do but

cry out *Mitakuye Oyasin*—"All my relations!"—and be permitted to exit through the sweat-lodge door, which is swung open so you can leave. That option is always available to you. You're never forced to stay in the *inipi*.

And yet, with rare exceptions, you don't do it. You resist the temptation. You suck in your gut and tough it out. You dig your nails into the bare soil of the floor. Sitting there naked in the superheated darkness, your bare knees only inches from the molten rocks in the central pit, you come right against the cutting edge of your own fear, your own pain. But the fear of pain is much worse than the pain itself. That's what you quickly come to realize. And that's a lesson you'll need to learn if you're going to survive in this world, so you may as well learn it well. And yet, in that fear, when you face it eye to eye, there's an *awareness*. . . .

If nothing else, it begins with an awareness of the fear itself. And then, somehow, you pass right through fear, right through that pain. You enter a realm both within and beyond fear and pain. So long as you feel pain, it means you're thinking of yourself. Only when you stop thinking of yourself can you actually get past that pain and that fear. You've got to forget yourself to find yourself. You yourself are the entryway. Your own mind, suddenly clear of all thoughts, all fear, is the door. And when you open that door and pass through into that other realm. . . .

But no, please forgive me, I have to stop here. Beyond this point it becomes utterly private, incommunicable. To put it into words would destroy it.

I'm permitted to speak or write only of the before and the after, of the simple actions that precede and follow that holiest of moments. Yet each of those simple actions is holy in its own way, too, from the moment at 6:30 when my cell door suddenly lumbers open with a metallic hiss and hum and grind and slam and my Saturday morning, my most sacred time of the week, begins.

I'm already up for half an hour or more—preparing my thoughts, my mind, and my heart, for the *inipi*. I try to keep my thoughts together, not let them wander too much. I take out my sacred pipe, slowly and methodically cleaning and polishing the unassembled red pipestone bowl and the long stem as a kind of contemplative spiritual practice. I don't put the two pieces together until just before the actual ceremony. Putting the two parts of the pipe together is like putting an electric plug into a socket—it creates a connection and releases powers that only a proper ceremony can contain. White Buffalo Calf Woman taught us how to use the original Pipe. [The pipe that] she brought us still exists among the Lakota people, guarded over by Chief Arvol Looking Horse, the nineteenth-generation keeper of the sacred white buffalo calf Pipe. To us, that original Pipe is as sacred as the original Cross would be to a Christian. Arvol has come to visit us here at Leavenworth, giving us spiritual counsel and even more personal sense of connection with that Pipe.

So, just cleaning and polishing my pipe—a descendant of that wonderful original—and sharing some of its power, helps focus my mind and pushes away all dark thoughts. I'm proud to have been chosen as a pipe carrier. That sacred pipe, when I smoke it during the ceremony, takes my prayers of thanks right up to the Creator.

Wakan Tanka hears us. The Great Spirit listens to every word of every prayer—yes, even to the prayers of these castaway children here in Leavenworth.

After rolling my pipe, still in two parts, back into its bundle, I prepare the contents of my medicine bag. Exactly what's in there only I need to know, though there's nothing that would surprise you. The usual stuff for the ceremony, but nonetheless sacred and personal to me. I also gather in a separate bundle two bags of noodles I've bought at the prison commissary; they'll go into the pot of boiling water the cook keeps going on the fire outside the sweat lodge. We each bring something like that, if we can—a couple of sausages, a bottle of chili peppers, a six-pack of soda pop, some potato chips, whatever. These are for the communal sharing held after the ceremony.

I'm grateful not to be working my usual eight hours at the furniture factory today, as I do during the week. Though Saturday is the most common visiting day at Leavenworth, I've asked family and friends not to schedule visits in the morning or early afternoon, the hours of the sweat. I also skip breakfast this morning, focusing my whole being on the coming ceremony.

Shortly after 8:00 AM, the prison chaplain's voice comes over the loudspeakers: "Native American sweat ceremony will be held today," he announces. That's good news. You're never quite sure when you wake up on Saturday morning if the sweat will actually be held. The only reason we don't have a sweat is if there's a lockdown, or a heavy fog, or some especially stormy weather that prevents the guards up in the guntowers from keeping an eye on us down in the yard. Otherwise, we go no matter what the weather is like. We've been out there on below-zero winter days and in pouring rain. Nothing stops us if we can help it. It amazes me how we learn to call a rainstorm "bad." There's nothing more beautiful than a storm—something you rarely get to experience in here other than vaguely hearing the thunder shuddering through the thick stone walls as you lie in your cell without even a window to the world outside. There are times I'd give anything just to go out walking in a storm, soaking up the rain and thunder and the lightning in the flesh, feeling a oneness with the Great Mystery.

Being out in storms was something I always loved as a boy. All that thunder and lightning spoke to me. I used to go out walking in it. They say you can hear Crazy Horse's voice in the thunder if you listen hard. But that, too, has been taken from us in here. Even the thunder and the lightning they take away. Not much they let us have.

Even the *inipi* itself they allow only because of years and years of struggle in the courts, which finally ruled that Native Americans in prison have at least limited religious rights, such as practicing the *inipi* and carrying a pipe and a medicine bundle. Those rights are given—sometimes grudgingly—here in Leavenworth, but at least they're given. State prisons can be worse than federal prisons in that regard. Just recently a Creek-Seminole inmate named Glen Sweet was to be executed at a state prison, not far from here in Missouri. After all his appeals were exhausted and the hour for his execution approached, he asked to have one last *inipi*, one final

cleansing in the prison sweat lodge, just before his execution by lethal injection. Not much to ask, you'd think. But, no. His request was refused, and he died without any ceremony. Imagine if he were a Catholic and had been denied last rites! I learned all this from our own spiritual advisor, Henry Wahwassuck, who walked Glen Sweet to the execution chamber and watched him die.

"He was an Indian," Henry told me. "He died brave, like an Indian dies. He'll have his *inipi* ceremony in the Sky World. They can't take it away from him up there!"

Now I wait for the call to go down to the sweat lodge.

One of the bros calls down the corridor, "Hey, weather's clear. Temperature's about twenty out there!"

Good. I like it when it's cold. Being in the scalding heat inside of the sweat lodge with all that pure freezing cold on the outside somehow makes the sweat ceremony seem even more intense.

A little after 7:30 AM, I gather my pipe and bundles, head out of my cell down the narrow corridor to the stairwell and make my way down the stairs to the prison chaplain's office door, where we gather around until we get the final OK to have the sweat—or as the hacks (guards) like to call it, the "Pow-Wow." I pass through two metal detectors before I'm finally out through the complex of corridors and outbuildings into the icy open air of the yard. Outside there's one more metal detector check.

With the other bros I stand there for quite a while in front of the locked gate to the tall wire fence they've built around the sweat lodge. Wearing just sweatpants and T-shirt and the like, we're all shivering in the bracing air as we wait for the guard to unlock the gate. But the cold air feels good. And it's pure, unlike the heavy worn-out, breathed-out air in the cellblock. I fill my lungs with the coldness, enjoying every second of it. We stand there exchanging pleasantries, but there's not much joshing around on this sacred occasion. We're all focusing on the inward journey we're about to take. Finally, the chaplain unlocks the gate and we file in, maybe sixteen or eighteen of us.

The guard counts us for the third or fourth time, and says, "Okay, you're in. Back later." He locks us in and walks away. We may be locked inside a twelve-foot-high steel fence inside a maximum-security prison directly up against the north wall flanked by two towering gun towers, but—suddenly—we're free!

Now we each make our preparations. The drum keepers set up the drum outside the lodge. The fire keeper starts the big fire outside the lodge, the fire that will heat all the sacred stones for the ceremony to come. Each of us sets a pinch or two of tobacco, along with our prayers, onto the fire. The cook gets the big pot of water boiling on another fire off to the side. I hand him the two bags of noodles I've brought. Beside him he gathers a growing pile of packaged foodstuffs, a few fresh vegetables and some soft drinks. We set up the little stone altar and dress it with sage and sweetgrass and other ceremonial items. Those of us who are pipe carriers assemble our pipes for the ceremony ahead, setting them down for the time being

at the altar as an offering. We also set out our eagle feathers with a prayer of offering. Then we stand around and chat good-naturedly, maybe sip some hot coffee, all of us feeling good. It's pretty much a social hour until about 10:30 AM or so, when the loudspeakers ring out, "The count is clear!" meaning everybody's been accounted for at the last head count.

By now it's nearly 11:00 a.m. and we await the arrival from the outside world of our spiritual advisor, Henry, whom I've known since we were kids together at the Wahpeton BIA school.¹ He also had the high honor of spending five years within these walls himself back in the 1970s. Henry was one of those brave souls against whom the government built a case at that time—as they did against so many others who had done nothing but defend their people.

Henry's our sweat leader for today. He's a friend to all of us, a wonderfully spiritual guy—and one tough-nosed dude, let me tell you. When it comes to the *inipi*, he sees to it that everything's done just right. Every detail has to be followed just so. Henry himself brought in most of the materials for the building of the sweat lodge—the saplings that create the skeletal structure of the domed lodge, and the rocks—small and large stones of fire-resistant gray-black lava—that we use in the fire. The lodge's covering we've pieced together from torn blankets and miscellaneous pieces of canvas we managed to scrounge up here in Leavenworth. Maybe five feet high and nearly fifteen feet across, it's sort of make-shift looking, I suppose, but to us it's as impressive looking, and certainly as holy, as any cathedral.

Now the singers set up the drum and start beating out a low, steady rhythm. They begin one of the sacred songs, a pipe song, the first of many songs to be sung this day, and we finally start filling our pipes for the ceremony ahead. The big bass boom of the drum catches the attention of the guards up in the gun towers on either side. We can see the shadowed silhouettes of their heads bobbing around up there, staring down at us. I guess they're used to looking down at our strange doings. Must lighten up an otherwise boring Saturday morning for them. I wonder if they get a whiff of the perfumed smoke from the sage and sweetgrass and cleansing cedar. I pray they do.

Now Henry finally arrives—they don't let him in till the last possible moment, it seems—and the chaplain locks him into the sweat compound with us. Henry has a big hearty hello and a handshake and a bear hug for just about everyone. But his smiles quickly turn to seriousness. He checks the place out to make sure everything's ready for the ceremony. When he sees that all is in order down to the last tiny detail, he finally announces: "Everything's in its place. It's time!"

Those are his exact words every time. That's the signal for us to enter the sweat lodge.

By now we've stripped down bare naked, wrapped only in a torn strip of old army blanket—which we've had to use lately since they confiscated our ceremonial towels. We line up outside the door to the *inipi*, carrying our pipes and gourd rattles and our eagle feathers. Someone once asked Henry why we had to be naked and he said, "Did you ever see a baby born wearing a diaper or underpants?" Often the door

of the sweat lodge is compared to the opening into the womb of Mother Earth. I also like to think of it as a doorway *into* yourself and *through* yourself and then right *out* of yourself. Your *self*'s the first thing you've got to leave behind when you enter the *inipi*.

We enter through the pulled-back door flap, turning immediately to the left and moving clockwise around the interior of the lodge, each of us assuming our places on the bare, well-smoothed dirt floor. Whoever's been chosen that day to pour the water on the red-hot rocks to create the steam enters first, moving around the circular lodge and taking his seat beside Henry, who's already in his place, sitting just to the right of the still-open door, preparing his ceremonial paraphernalia. It's still cool inside the lodge; the central firepit in the center is empty. The red-hot stones will be handed in later by the fire keeper from the fire outside, each glowing stone brought reverently inside on deer-antler carriers. The first seven are brought in one by one—one each for the four sacred directions, Mother Earth, the People, and Wakan Tanka. More rocks will be brought in later, depending on how hot Henry wants it to get. But even before the stones are brought in, the body heat of some twenty men quickly warms it up to a cozy temperature in there.

Outside stands the doorkeeper, who will close and open the door four times, or four "rounds" as we call them, during the two-to-three hour ceremony. Next we pray and "offer thought," as Henry calls it, trying to bring our collective minds together as one mind. We pass the sage around the circle; everybody takes a little pinch and chews it or maybe puts it into their hair. And then the eagle feathers are passed around, so we can all share their energy. The flap is still open, and the first seven rocks are brought in on the antlers and placed in the central pit at our knees. We offer cedar on the stones, to cleanse and purify the air, driving out any bad thoughts. Then Henry asks for the water, and a bucket is brought in and placed in the center of the doorway inside the lodge. Cedar is offered onto the glowing stones themselves, hissing sharply as it fills the air with its lovely smell. Then Henry sprinkles the cedar onto the stones, and blesses the water four times.

Now the pourer takes Henry's buffalo-horn scoop, fills it with water, and makes the first pour onto the rocks. By now the door's closed and . . . But, no, that's as far as I can take you here. The rest, Henry tells me, cannot be told. It can be experienced, but not told.

I can only say that four times the door is opened and closed, four times the water is poured from the buffalo horn onto the molten rocks, four times the superheated steam explodes and envelops us . . . but, *no more!* "Don't divulge what happens, none of the specifics that happen to you in there!" Henry insists.

And I honor that. I hope you will, too. Already I've probably said too much, but Henry will go over this and see that what should be unspoken remains unspoken. This precaution is for your sake as much as mine. To speak of what happens to me in the *inipi* would be like giving you the medicine intended for me. It would be pointless, even harmful—to you as well as to me.

Enough said. *Mitakuye Oyasin.*

After the fourth round, and our final prayers, the door to the *inipi* is opened for the final time and we file out the way we came in. The twenty-degree air hits me like a powerful slap, almost knocking me backward. Yet it feels wonderful. Off to one side there's a jerryrigged shower with unheated water that I enjoy shivering under for a few seconds, washing off the sweat and slapping wildly at myself. It's unbelievably invigorating after the scalding-hot sweat bath. My flesh seems to come alive. I could swear I'm glowing, I feel so good. I have been reborn!

We make a circle outside and light our pipes, and "offer thought" again. It's all very intimate, very moving. After burning some more sage and sweetgrass, we empty out our pipes, then dress and have our communal sharing of all the foodstuffs the cook has fixed up. By now everyone's bright-eyed, smiling, laughing, talking a blue streak. There's a really powerful camaraderie. It's a happy and a holy moment. We hate for it to end. But soon the chaplain appears at the gate, and a guard barks, "Time's up. Gotta get ready for four o'clock head count!" That instantly dampens the magic, and moments later we're on our way back through those three metal detectors, back into the cellblock, back into the ordinary world. Back to Leavenworth after seven hours of blessed freedom. And those guards in their gun towers never even realized we'd escaped!

NOTES

Originally published in Leonard Peltier, *Prison Writings* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999), 183-98.

1. *Editor's note:* In 1953, when Peltier was nine years old, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) took Peltier, his sister, and his cousin away from their grandmother. They were brought to the Wahpeton Indian School in North Dakota. As at many BIA schools, the environment was highly abusive; students were beaten if they were not considered "clean" upon inspection. Peltier left the school as soon as he could. See Peter Matthiessen, *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* (New York: Penguin, 1980), 45.

Epilogue

Incommunicado: Dispatches from a Political Prisoner

Marilyn Buck

September 11, 2001

before
morning-slow
I move
Julian hollers
 come come see
 the world trade center's
 exploding

she's not serious
no one would make that up
 would they?
 maybe
live on TV
 video mantra
 replay: plane crash
 replay: collapse
 slow motion, dying morning

no, not a made-for-TV movie
not a disaster film
not Hollywood special effects
 one tower falls
 the other follows

do chickens come home to roost?
 enormity crashes
 dazed disbelief
 (chickens won't roost here again
 pigeons either)

I, a political prisoner, can
 conceive why
 but comprehension is not complicity
 I look around me
 I know nothing
 I know too much
 there is no answer in death
 nor in dying

I know
 soon others will die
 dark smoke spreads
 cinders of wrath rise
 the eagle's talons flex
 hungry for revenge

(eyes locked on the shocking scene
 a Muslim sister whispers
they will blame the Muslims)

I know
 many will feed the eagle
 the Palestinians?
 (Palestinians are always suspect)

Muslims? Arabs?
 many will die red upon the land

I can't comprehend
 men who commit suicide
 taking civilians with them
 (a u.s. postal worker
 Columbine high school boys
 a man at McDonald's
 all-American suicide killers)

civilians
 used as warheads
 I shudder and walk away
 from death
 to my cell

Bich Kim runs in
if there's a world war three
they will shoot all the prisoners, won't they?

I shake my head
 I don't think so
but you, political prisoners
like you, won't they?
 I hope not
 (question marks
 the corners of my mouth:
 what do I know
 about the fine-print)

I turn to sweep the floor
 find rhythms of the ordinary

The Order: 9:00 AM PDT

a tap
 I turn
 a guard
come with me

I won't return today

I stand before the captain
we must lock you up
for your own safety
 (not for my safety)
you're intelligent you know why
 I speculate, no
 not for my safety
you must be locked up
just for your safety

I am
 stripped naked
 ID card confiscated
 everything taken
 I need my glasses!
keep the glasses

I keep a neutral face
handcuffed behind the back
clad in bile yellow for isolation
and flip-flops

I keep outrage
wrapped within my fists
I swallow anger
metal clangs swallow sound
the concrete cocoon swallows me

The "SHU": Special Housing Unit

"there was an old woman
she lived in a shoe"
what did she do?

9/11 no prisoner may speak to you
you may not speak to any prisoner

9/12 overheard voices
there are terrorists here
who are the terrorists?

9/14 silence, everyone behind her door listens
a legal call
small relief: it's political—Washington—
not something i did

9/17 no more calls
no visits
no mail
until further notice

incommunicado
i hang from a winding string
winding in this cocoon
i breathe deep
the air isn't good here

(from outside the walls Susan yells
you are not alone)
i breathe deeper

Sunday i get a radio: KPFA lifeline
Sikhs dead, detainees disappeared
political prisoners buried deeper
incommunicado

i remember another September 11: Chile '73
more than 3,000 dead
tortured assassinated disappeared
a CIA-supported coup
(the WTC bombers not-yet-born)
many people there still mourn
let us mourn all the dead
and the soon-to-die

i worry about the prisoners
isolation sucks at the spirit
i am furious: inferred association
held hostage in place of men
with u.s. weapons and CIA training
an infernal joke
the puppet masters laugh

i laugh to stay sane
before i explode in irony's flames

we are hostages
to blood-thirsty oil men
ready to splatter deserts
with daisy-cutters
their collateral damage
dead mothers and children
dead mother earth
dead daisies

(hasn't this happened before?
u.s. cavalry and smallpox blankets
special forces and blanker bombing)

(Susan is back
she taps on the wall: you are not alone)

i walk around the edges
how many walk on edges?
what edges do the Palestinians walk?

the food trap opens
 cold eggs the color of our clothes
 plunk—weekend brunch
 i swallow in silence

silence flees before sudden cacophony
 two women beat plastic bowls on metal doors
we want rec we want rec
the sun is out we want out
 my head is wrapped in metallic clanger
 bang bang bang
 i stay silent
 i bite my lip

hours pass: shift change 2:00
 the sun drops fast behind the wall
 finally: *who wants recreation?*
I do
me too

let me out first
 voices reach through the metal doors
 food traps clank
 handcuffs click
 one by one women are led
 to wire cages
 joy rings louder than the chains

i wait
 no guard comes
 i break silence
 you didn't ask me
 disembodied denial echoes through the walls
you can't go with the others
wait
not my decision
 i will miss the sundrops

"Perchance to Dream"

night comes
 i fall exhausted into sleep
 i dream of Dresden Hanoi Baghdad

whistles scream
 walls fall apart
 in waves
 Dali deserts
 watches tick
 waterdrip

dream shift:
 swords of steel glint against the sky
 a swarm and puff
 dark blood drops
 bituminous birds bank
 spread-eagled free fall
 ashes ashes they all fall
 down dark flashes
 cherry splashes on concrete
 Babel towers collapse in crying heaps
 a curtain rises gray
 covers gladiators draped across the stage

i wake cold-throated
 what time is it?
 my limbs locked
 beneath a concrete rockslide
 is this my tomb falling on me?

my chest is piled rock-heavy
 bodies rise from the shallows of my breath
 graze my eyes and flee
 across the desert scape
 shadow prints dissipate
 am i awake?

the Cyclops stabs my eye
 i must be awake
 i wrap a scratchy towel
 around my face
 i escape electric night
 into sightlessness

a ghost voice wails
what time is it?

a deep male boom
 1:24, go to sleep
 no, turn on the radio, talk to me
 no! no! please no, my eyes blink
 inside their blind
 little Brueghel men dance
 wooden-shoe notes
 ruthless on my sleep
 sound streams woman's babble
 pools beneath the door
 i hunker under the winding sheet

does she stop talking
 or do i descend?
 i don't remember

shift change
 shift change
 guards come and go
 officials pass by peering
 into our crypt-cages
 taking notes, verifying

Monday, September 24

the captain appears
we may release you today after 2:00
 2:00 comes and goes
 the shift changes
 i wait and wonder: will other politicals be released today
 i wait
 hope is the moment's thief
 don't wait!

at last: *Buck roll out*
 i leap a jack-in-the-box
 ready
 ready
 the metal key clangs just before the 4:00 count
 i gasp relief
 and hurry through before the gates slam
 shut and i am left below

Eurydice whom Orpheus glimpsed
 a moment too soon
 i step out
 a four o'clock unfolding, fuchsia in the shading light
 back into the routine prisoner's plight

Appendix

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