

Mass Incarceration and Control Units: Crime Control or Social Control?



Despite the current political climate, or rather because of it, the question "Which side are you on?" has never meant more than it does today. This pamphlet is one part of a national organizing effort to combat control unit prisons and the racist hysteria facilitating mass incarceration. We urge you to join us and work with us as we declare our side against U.S. insanity and for Humanity.

This pamphlet contains the transcript from a program held on October 21, 1995 in Chicago, Illinois. The program was co-sponsored by:

**The National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Political Prisoners & POWs
and
The Committee to End the Marion Lockdown**

Presentations from:

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Sanyika Shakur

Jose Lopez

**MASS INCARCERATION
AND CONTROL UNITS:
CRIME CONTROL
OR SOCIAL CONTROL?**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	page 1
NANCY KURSHAN.....	page 2
ALAN BERKMAN.....	page 6
NOZOMI IKUTA.....	page 16
SANYIKA SHAKUR.....	page 20
JOSE LOPEZ.....	page 26

INTRODUCTION

On October 27, 1983 all of the United States Penitentiary at Marion was locked down, thus producing the first control unit prison in the history of the United States. In the fall of 1985, the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown (CEML) came into being with our first event co-sponsored with the National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of War. The event was designed to commemorate two full years of the lockdown and to generate a determination to end it. Unfortunately we failed to end it, but with that event we started a tradition of fall programs which would commemorate the lockdown, help us remember the courageous people caged therein, and energize us to continue to struggle against control units.

On October 21, 1995 CEML, along with the National Committee, held our eleventh annual fall program. The speakers were all extraordinary as was the energy in the room provided by the 150 people who attended the event. Additional energy and significance was given to the event by the fact that The National Campaign to Stop Control Unit Prisons held its second national meeting in Chicago that same weekend. Over 40 people traveled to the meeting from all across the United States, coming from places as far away as New York City, San Francisco, Boston, Denver, Dayton, Newark, etc. They also attended the program.

Since the program, we have had many requests for transcripts of the talks at the event. We have thus decided to produce the pamphlet that is now before you. We hope that you will find the transcript informative and helpful.

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NANCY KURSHAN

My name is Nancy Kurshan and I am a member of the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown which is part of the National Campaign to Stop Control Unit Prisons. On behalf of CEML and the National Committee to Free Puerto Rican POWs, I would like to welcome you here tonight. Before introducing our wonderful panel of speakers, I would like to explain the title of this program.

The title is "Mass Incarceration and Control Unit Prisons: Crime Control or Social Control?" You all know what we think the answer to this questions is. Let me just say a few words about why we believe it's social control.

First, let's consider mass incarceration. Several years ago CEML printed the statistic that one out of every four Black men in the United States was under some form of control by the so-called criminal justice system — that is that they were either in prison or jail or on parole or probation. People couldn't believe this and we had to produce many references and documents to show that we were correct. Then, just last week the Sentencing Project in Washington, D.C. released a new study revealing that this proportion is now one out of every three Black men. Last year at our program on the Racist Imprisonment Binge, Jerome Miller noted that he had studied this same dynamic in Washington, D.C. and Baltimore and in these two cities the proportion was actually one out of every two!

Some of you know what this means first hand. The rest of us need to think about what this must mean. Think about the impact that this situation must have on Black communities. I could go on and on with different statistics like these, and they all would reveal the same phenomenon — that the imprisonment of people of color is becoming the national pastime for white America.

And what has all of this gotten us? Every study shows that crime does not go down as imprisonment goes up. For those of you who are not sure about this, or who don't believe it, I urge you to read the four page pull out in this issue of our newsletter, *Walkin' Steel*, that you received when you came in tonight. Indeed, we are no safer for this mass imprisonment binge. We are no more kind and gentle. Our potential as human beings is not one iota advanced. Our future is no more promising. We are nothing more than an *incarcer - nation*. We are becoming nothing more than a parasite country living off the terror of people of color, with an increasing number of white people dependent on the criminal justice system for jobs and employment.

And this doesn't even begin to address chain gangs or the death penalty or Pell grants, or any of the rest.

Well, then, Newt and his buddies might say, if mass incarceration doesn't

MASS INCARCERATION & CONTROL UNITS

bringing down the crime rate, perhaps the future lies in control unit prisons. Ten years ago in, 1985, when we began our work, there was only one control unit prison. It was Marion prison. Now the number of control units is about 40. And are we safer for that? Are the prisons safer? Has any good come of that? When we in CEML debated the Bureau of Prisons about the value of Marion ten years ago, they insisted, "Give us Marion and we will put all the bad apples there and that will free up the rest of the prison system."

We said that's not true. Rather than freeing up the system, Marion would serve as an anchor and pull the system in a more and more repressive direction. Now, ten years later, we have 40 Marions -- each one more barbaric than the one before, and nothing has improved as a result. Just to say the names of these torture chambers is to spread revulsion: Marion, Florence, Pelican Bay, Southport, Westville, and so on down the line. These are some of the main obscenities of white America.

Let's do one more thing. Let's look at an historical context. The imprisonment rate in the United States, which had been more or less steady between 1925 and 1971, started to soar in 1972. And that was the same year that one



Nancy Kurshan speaking at "Mass Incarceration and Control Unit Prisons: Crime Control or Social Control?"

NANCY KURSHAN

wing of Marion prison was opened as the first actualization of a control unit. Both of these things in the same year. Well, what else was happening then? In the late sixties the US Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) murdered dozens of Black Panthers and members of the Black Liberation Army and put hundreds more in prison. In fact, some are still there today — people like Geronimo Pratt and Sundiata Acoli, and many, many others.



CEML and friends demonstrating in Chicago against the "Contract for America" and continued prison construction in Illinois.

Then, on August 21, 1971 revolutionary prison leader George Jackson was murdered in San Quentin prison. Just a few days later, Attica in upstate New York, erupted into the greatest prison rebellion in the history of the US, and then four days later, into one of the greatest massacres in US history thanks to the then-governor of New York, Nelson Rockefeller.

We don't believe that it is possible to look at these events and see coincidences. No, we see causes and effects. Mass incarceration and control units were not and are not efforts to control crime. They were and are efforts to control the democratic impulses of people of color — and since the entire system of the United States is built on suppressing that democratic impulse, to pursue it is revolutionary. That is what mass incarceration and control

MASS INCARCERATION & CONTROL UNITS

units are — counter revolutionary institutions, counter-insurgency institutions created by the US of A to try to suppress the quest for fundamental social change.

Understanding this and believing this leads us to one more thought, and I'll end with that. Although remedial efforts are good, although reform is positive, ultimately to get rid of our racist criminal justice system will demand a fundamental change in society. No matter how unpopular that may be to say these days, no matter how many progressive people have turned away from this assertion, it is the truth and we believe it. There can be no issue of trying to explain the problems of the criminal justice system to the bad guys — they know it and that in fact is why they have designed it that way. We can explain it to ourselves. We must explain it to ourselves. We must understand it and clear away the claptrap that the media puts in front of us. Then, perhaps, we will be able to fight against it better.

Prisons and control units do even more than incarcerate people of color. They incarcerate the minds of white people. If ever we hope to break with our whiteness and pursue human-ness instead, we have to break our chains of delusion. In doing so we will help to excarcerate people of color and in their struggle to free themselves, they will help to free us.

Thank you.



ALAN BERKMAN

(N. Kurshan): I first met Alan about 20 years ago. At that time he seemed to be every place a white person of principal should have been. Alan was and is a physician. He chose to practice medicine in places like the South Bronx, and in Lowndes County, Alabama where doctors were as scarce as in the poorest of the Third World countries.

As revolutionary movements developed in the 60s and 70s, Alan used his political experience and his medical skills in support of the Black Liberation Movement, and the Puerto Rican Independence Movement and the American Indian Movement. Alan was at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, during the historic occupation and confrontation between the US government and the American Indian Movement. In 1982 Alan was imprisoned for nine months for refusing to testify before a federal grand jury investigating the Black Liberation Movement. He was later indicted for providing medical care to a wounded revolutionary after a shootout with the police. Rather than allow himself to be incarcerated, Alan chose to elude the authorities and continue his political activities. In 1985 he was arrested in Philadelphia and charged with numerous indictments, including a series of political bombings of government and military targets. Alan was held in preventive detention for two years until his trial in 1987. This despite the fact that he was diagnosed with cancer. After conviction, Alan was sent to Marion Federal Penitentiary — the worst prison in the United States— where he spent two years.

I visited Alan when he was in jail awaiting trial in Washington, D.C. He was on a very well-guarded, locked ward of a hospital. The prison ward. Suffering from Hodgkins Disease, Alan was extremely frail physically and I left feeling deeply frightened about his survival. But at the same time I was overwhelmed by Alan's spiritual strength. Alert, curious, politically engaged. Well, Alan did survive his imprisonment. And more. Prison was unable to break his will to struggle for justice. He has been out several years now and remains an outspoken critic of the US prison system. He was one of the earliest voices on behalf of Mumia Abu-Jamal. This is the first opportunity we here in Chicago have had to hear from him, and we are extremely honored that he is here with us tonight. Please welcome Alan Berkman. (Long, standing ovation.)

Thank you so much. Actually, I want to thank all of you who helped me to live and be here tonight. Some of my oldest friends in life are here as well as newer friends, people who wrote to me, people who I never had the chance to meet, to write to or to personally thank. Organizations like the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown, the Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional (MLN) and church groups gave me enormous support.

The campaign to get me decent medical care in the context of being a high security political prisoner, is a good example of the impact our efforts can have. So when we do campaigns, even when it seems that the odds are

MASS INCARCERATION & CONTROL UNITS

against us, I hope that my standing here tonight shows that we can sometimes beat the odds. Certainly you helped me to beat the odds. I thank you for that.

I want to read a solidarity message that was sent by eight women political prisoners who are all incarcerated together in Pleasanton, California.

"To the event commemorating the Marion Lockdown: We join you in marking the anniversary of the Marion Lockdown honoring those who have suffered the long months and years of isolation, who have

resisted and struggled to bring an end to the cruelty of control units. Many of us women political prisoners and Prisoners of War have spent time in the federal control units. We can attest to the fact that control units equal torture. So we join you in recognizing the extreme urgency of the campaign to shut down all control units. Our sense of urgency about this only grows as we experience the general worsening of prison conditions and the damage to mind and body caused by these increasingly repressive and inhuman conditions. Finally, we send our love and support to all those locked down in control units today and especially to our brothers, the political prisoners and Prisoners of War in Florence, Pelican Bay, Westville and Marion. And to many more, such as the women isolated in the special housing unit in Marianna. Hasta la Victoria Siempre! Close the Control Units! — Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War, FCI Dublin, California, October 1995. The individuals are Marilyn Buck, Linda Evans, Ida McCray, Dylcia Pagán, Lucy Rodríguez, Carmen Valentín, Laura Whitehorn and Donna Willmott."

I got out of prison three years ago. For any of you who have done time, enough time so that the prison becomes your life, you know that one of the things that happens when you get out is that you start saying, "I'm doing this for the first time." So when I got out of prison in Minnesota, I hugged my daughter in the flesh for the first time in many years. I remember when I got to make love to somebody that I was in love with for the first time in many years. I opened a letter that hasn't already been opened and read by somebody else for the first time in many years, or let myself out of my own door for the first time in many years. Coming to Chicago for the first time in many years is not as much fun as having sex for the first time in many years, but it's been a wonderful visit and I'm very glad to be here. It's wonderful to see you all again.



Alan Berkman

ALAN BERKMAN

It was wonderful to spend some time at the control unit meeting that Nozomi is going to speak about later. It was a very impressive gathering. Having been in a control unit and been fortunate enough to get out, I can honestly say that the work you are doing is incredibly important and greatly appreciated.

I want to say that I agree when the flyer for this event states that there are social roots to the phenomena of mass imprisonment; I actually think that there are social roots to the proliferation of control unit prisons. I will get to that, but first I want to give a first hand account of the conditions in Marion. Nancy introduced the issue of Marion. I think at this point, unfortunately, that what I experienced there is far from the worst of what is currently going on. Having read about Pelican Bay and Westville, I am convinced that there are quantitatively worse conditions going on. But let me talk about the ones I know about.

Over the years I have read the CEML stuff, and it always says that the prison cells in Marion are 7' by 10' — I swear it was 7' by 8'. I don't know where the other 2' came from. Anyway, it was very small, and at that point we spent 22 hours and 45 minutes a day — I guess they have loosened it up to 22 hours and 30 minutes per day now — in this concrete box, with a concrete slab with a plastic pallet to sleep on and with two cardboard boxes for our possessions. We weren't allowed to have any clothes or anything from the outside, we just had the khakis.



MASS INCARCERATION & CONTROL UNITS

One of the "nice" things about Marion though, is that since they just locked you up like an animal, it was the only place in the federal prison system where, if you didn't get dressed, they didn't care if you hung around naked all day. Except on Friday mornings when the warden would come around with his little entourage. Because, you see, in the federal prison system the warden has to show that he is not afraid of the prisoners. The warden always has to make him or herself accessible to the prisoners at least once a week. Usually they will stand on the line in chow halls in many prisons. But in Marion there is no chow hall to speak of because we don't get to go out of our cells. So, he would walk the tier, and the only day that you had to put your clothes on at Marion was on Friday mornings when the warden came by.

When we got out of the cell we didn't get to go outside. Most of the cells in Marion don't have windows, so you don't see the outside. When we got out of our cells, we only got out to walk up and down the tiers on the half of the range we were on. Going outside and seeing the sun, getting some fresh air, happened for a grand total of two hours a week, usually at 7:00 in the morning. If it was winter, we didn't go out at all for several months in a row.

We got two ten minute phone calls a month, needless to say, monitored. One of the nice things at Marion was that nothing was subtle. You actually watched the local guard on your unit listening on the phone as well as knowing that they were taping it someplace else. So when we talk about the phone calls being monitored, there was no issue about it. Truthfully, I really had questions about whether the pain of the abrupt phone calls, if you are lucky enough to have family and children, was worth the ten minutes. At one point my daughter Sarah said to me, "Daddy the phone calls aren't working" because we always had to hang up before we could say anything.

There were no contact visits, that goes without saying. Although we had no contact with anybody, a couple of times a week we would be stripped in our cells and taken to an empty cell while our cells would be tossed and searched. It had nothing to do with security. This is my thesis for the evening: maxi, maxi prisons have no more to do with security than imprisonment has to do with controlling crime. They have a different function.

At Marion, every time that we had to leave our cell, we had to back up to the slot in the bars and get handcuffed behind our back. We would get steered by three or four guards who carried riot batons. It was the only place in the federal system that the guards were armed with these metal-balled riot batons. Sometimes, I could never figure out why, even when they were just moving us inside the prison, they would put waist chains and a box on too. Sometimes they didn't; I guess it was what mood they were in that day.

ALAN BERKMAN

What's the box? The box is a metal brace that actually locks your handcuffs so that you can't move them at all and locks it up against your waist chain. It's called the black box.

Those are the physical conditions. I think they are not as important as the psychological conditions that are established at Marion and other control unit prisons. Part of that is just the sheer isolation. There is the isolation of being in a cell by yourself. But Marion itself and most control unit prisons are in very isolated spots. Marion is down at the very end of this state, 400 miles from here. To get there, most people fly to Springfield, Missouri and drive. Many prisoners had ruptured their relationships with their families and never got visits. It was incredibly expensive and a very hard place to reach. I was one of the very few people who had a support network of family and friends, so that I did get visits at Marion. I got a Christmas visit in 1987. There were three of us out of a prison of over 400 men who had a visit over the Christmas holidays.

I want to describe a visit, because I think its important. Going to visits at Marion taught me an important lesson. I just told you what our daily life was like. When we had a visit, we were taken through these hallways alone; they never moved more than one prisoner at a time in Marion. It's a very surreal, Kafkaesque



MASS INCARCERATION & CONTROL UNITS

situation, walking through these long gleaming corridors. The gates move electronically. Cameras watch you. This guard steers you by handcuffs behind your back, and you see no other prisoners. You just have the sense that this whole prison is here for you. It's you inside this mammoth, high security prison. They take you to a small strip room. And even though you have just come from your cell where you haven't been anywhere for months, they strip search you. And after they strip search you, they re-handcuff you and escort you to a little concrete box that has plexiglass, and you have a non-contact visit over the phone. And then they take you and then they strip search you again. Then they take you back to your unit.

The strip searches are degrading and infuriating. They would make me want to hurt somebody because they made no sense. There is no security rationale. Slowly it dawned on me that that's the whole point: they make no sense. Because the key thing to understand about control unit prisons is that they are arbitrary and irrational. The people in charge show to you, the prisoner, that they can do anything they want, whenever they want, for any reason or for no reason at all. I began to think on that and I realized that I thought, there's a big difference between power and authority. Marion and all the other control unit prisons are concrete and steel embodiments of the dynamics of power.

You see, "authority" implies that there are rules and regulations of some sort that govern both those who are in authority and those who are being governed by those in authority. There is a sense that there are rights remaining to those who are in the subservient position. When you have constitutional authority, its theoretically the people who give the authority. Nobody would say that prisoners give the authority. But power recognizes no rights but its own. There are no rights remaining to you as a prisoner or to anyone subjected to power. I would say that that is the same dynamic that we see in colonial situations, for instance.

Probably many people know that during the German occupation, when the resistance would kill a German soldier, ten or fifty or one hundred people would be killed in exchange. It had no proportionality. It didn't matter, because the whole essence of power is that the oppressed are not human and therefore have no human rights. That's really what the control unit prisons are designed to do. They are designed to impose on the individual the sense that he or she is no longer a human being. They want to strip the prisoner of any sense of self. That's what they consider to be a victory at Marion Penitentiary.

Power is arbitrary, Nancy spoke about the arbitrary way people are sent to Marion. You know they say everybody is the "worst of the worst." You know that that's a lie. In the federal system, it's anybody that the FBI and the

ALAN BERKMAN

Attorney General says goes to Marion. I was a medium security prisoner; I had been convicted for the first time; I had no convictions for prison violence or a prison escape attempt. It made no difference. I was a political prisoner, and like many, many, many other political prisoners, I was somebody that they were going to isolate, somebody that they were going to attempt to break. Someone, who, if they could strip me of my sense of dignity and self they would be stripping me of my political identity. The FBI thought that it would be a victory over the movement that I came from. It's the same strategy they used against the political prisoners from Puerto Rico or the Black Liberation Movement or Native American or Mexican liberation movements. By breaking a political prisoner or POW, the FBI hopes to not only destroy the individual, but also to strike a blow against the movements that people represent.

Now obviously, I think that this phenomenon of dehumanization is not unique to control unit prisons. I don't think it's unique even to prisons. I think it happens in all prisons; it's part of what it's about. It happens in society. We know that if you are not white, male, monied and straight in this society, you are dehumanized. You have to fight to maintain your sense of self. But there is something particular about the control unit prisons. When I was in prison a number of years ago, I wrote an article. In the article I analogized Marion to what I thought Mississippi must have been like during the slave system. It's the ultimate place where people who fight the hardest against being stripped of their dignity get sent. People in power always need one place where they can try to destroy people who rebel against the "merely intolerable" conditions in the rest of the prison system. And that's what I think Marion and the rest of these control unit prisons are.

Now I would quickly like to come back to the issue of the social roots. Remember, Marion opened in 1963, but the control unit was a product of the Nixon Administration. The control unit opened in 1972. The control unit was developed by psychologists for revolutionaries in the prison system. This Dr. Shein, the psychologist who helped develop Marion, talked about using Korean War brainwashing techniques to change revolutionaries in the prison system. It's gotten used on a much broader basis since then.

What was going on during that period of time? Richard Nixon ran in 1968 on a very important platform. There was the Vietnam War internationally, but what was his major domestic platform for those of you old enough to remember? It was law and order. I think that the Nixon campaign, using what he called his "Southern Strategy," was the first time that the issue of crime became THE issue for the US domestic political agenda. What did it really mean? It meant that in the face of urban rebellion by Black communities all over this country, crime was the way that politicians were going to have a discourse with white people about what to do with the insurgent

MASS INCARCERATION & CONTROL UNITS



Third World communities inside the United States. Everybody knew it. It was only a little less grotesque than David Duke. Since then, it's gone through several generations. "Law and Order" became the "War on Crime" during the 1970's and became the "War on Drugs" during the Reagan Administration.

Being "tough on crime" has become the way that politicians to this day

discuss race relations with the white electorate. A key part of Bill Clinton's electoral campaign was to leave New Hampshire in the middle of the Democratic primary and execute a mentally retarded Black man in Arkansas. He made sure that everyone got the message in this country about what his fundamental feelings were. George Bush, as you might remember, used Willie Horton to get elected.

I think that "Law and Order — Crime" has become an ideological cover for a social policy of mass imprisonment in this country. I think if a million Black, Latino and some poor white youth were just pulled off the street and put into concentration camps, there would be some rebellion and unrest about that. But both the fear of crime and the reality of crime in our degenerating society are manipulated in such a way that it's had an impact on every community. It's consolidated and gets its power from the white community, no question about it. But I think if we look at it honestly, every community, including communities of color, have been impacted by this incredible drum beat about fear and what to do about it. The result is that on any one day,

ALAN BERKMAN

there are now more than a million people in long term prisons, and during the course of 1994, three to four million people passed through jails in the United States.

One of the things that I've learned from prisons is that when you are stripped of your sense of humanity or somebody attacks your sense of humanity, the reaction is rage. I think before I went to prison, I understood rage a little bit; I wasn't totally naive. I think that my fundamental view was that rage is some unfortunate part of our animal nature. In prison I learned that rage is one of our most human emotions. I think rage is what human beings feel when other people treat us like we're not human beings. It's intimate, it's personal, it's human, it shows that we are fighting back. I think that rage explains many of the social phenomena we see these days. Rage is often not well directed: you can hurt yourself, you can hurt your family, you can hurt your community, you can do bad things unless you have the leadership to direct your rage in the right direction. But don't ever think that it's not human.

I think we have a country where the social policies, the increasing poverty, the increasing racism that we have experienced, create rage. It strips more and more people in this country, particularly in communities of color, of the very sense of dignity, self esteem, self determination, the very essence that makes people human. People rage in response to that: we have social rage. And what's this government's answer to social rage? The answer is "let's imprison it."

Then what happens when you imprison rage? You have this ever spiralling loop of poverty, racism, rage, repression, imprisonment, more rage, more repression. It's a really destructive feedback loop. When those in power try to imprison rage, then they need someplace where they can extinguish the rage by destroying the very humanity that the rage breeds on. That's what control unit prisons are for. The people whose rage is most deeply rooted and the people whose rage is most political and directed against the real enemy are those who end up in the control unit prisons. There, there is a concerted effort to strip those people of their humanity, because once they are no longer human, they will no longer rage. And that's what I think many political prisoners have experienced and successfully resisted.

I do think that's why so many political prisoners and POWs are in control unit prisons. Part of it is the sheer phenomenon of isolation. They want to isolate political people from the movements that they are part of. But part of it, as I said before, is I also think that some of the political people are the most effective organizers that I have ever met in my life, and they don't stop being good organizers when they go into prison. They organize African American history groups, they organize Puerto Rican history groups, they

MASS INCARCERATION & CONTROL UNITS

organize AIDS groups and every one of those groups is based on a sense of self-empowerment of the people inside prisons. They take the same lessons about nation-building and movement-building that they developed as political people on the outside and develop it in prison. Those are people that the prison system doesn't want to help people inside figure out how to channel that rage. I think that's why we find so many of our political brothers and sisters spending so much time in control unit prisons.

I want to come back to thanking you, because I am firmly convinced that the chain of common humanity that unites us across a lot of divisions is always going to get broken at the weakest link. And the elite in this country, knowing from generations and centuries how to utilize racism and white supremacy, has focussed on the issue of crime and imprisonment as the weak link. People in prisons are demonized and called subhuman. William Bennett, who was the Secretary of Education under Reagan if you will remember, called prisoners "animals who should be beheaded." Those of us

who continue to reach out our hands to people in prison and do the work around prisons are trying to keep those links of common humanity alive. I think that's incredibly important work to do, and I thank you for that. The William Bennetts of the world will not prevail. (Standing ovation.)



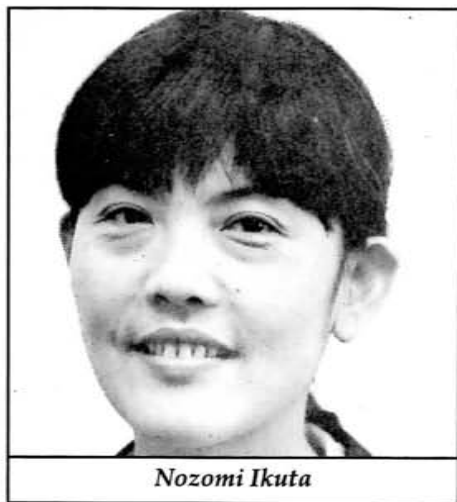
NOZOMI IKUTA

(N. Kurshan): Our next speaker is Nozomi Ikuta. Nozomi is the Director of Liberation Ministries, United Church Board for Homeland Ministries of the United Church of Christ. Rev. Ikuta is also a member of the National Council of Churches Racial Justice Group. She is Secretary of the Interfaith Prisoners of Conscience Committee where she works closely with Chicago's own Michael Yasutaki on issues dealing with political prisoners. Nozomi has visited many of the political prisoners held in US prisons, including seven of the fifteen Puerto Rican political prisoners, Mutulu Shakur, Tom Manning and others held in Florence ADX. In her capacity as a member of the National Interreligious Task Force on Criminal Justice she recently visited Florence ADX along with other members of the Task Force in an attempt to bring to light the brutal conditions there. We know Nozomi Ikuta as one of the most energetic and central members of the National Campaign to Stop Control Unit Prisons. She will talk with us tonight about the work of the National Campaign.

I would like to begin by thanking the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown and the National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Political Prisoners and POWs for the opportunity to share a few reflections with you. It is a tremendous privilege to be among so many of you who have worked with such courage and persistence in the struggle for justice and liberation.

I visited the new Supermax Control Unit Prison at Florence, Colorado, two times — once, about a year ago, before it opened, when we got to go back and actually see the cells, and again, about six months ago, when I visited with several prisoners there. My reflections are limited to my experience at Florence, which is the only control unit prison I have personally visited. But I hope that they will be applicable to the broader campaign to abolish control units, and to the prison movement more generally.

I'd like to thank Alan Berkman for his moving description of his experience at Marion. But for me, it's hard to put in words exactly what's so horrible about these prisons. Perhaps others of you who have visited them can understand what I mean when I say that the evil of the whole is somehow



Nozomi Ikuta

MASS INCARCERATION & CONTROL UNITS

even worse than the sum of its parts. The sensory deprivation; the shackling and strip searches; the lack of color, scenery, and fresh air; the disorienting, triangular-shaped recreation rooms; the practically non-existent library and educational opportunities; the utter denial of human contact; even the employment of Ph.D.'s in psychology to help create and maintain an environment of psychic torture — taken together, somehow these still don't fully convey the horror of the place.

But in the long run, I am not sure which is worse: the prison system's creation of such an evil, or the public's toleration (and worse, outright welcome) of it. After the heartbreak of Plexiglas separating prisoners from their loved ones and the knowledge of the strip searches and other forms of torture to which the prisoners will return, a visitor emerges from the Florence dungeon to a booming housing market and prosperity made possible by the very torture which takes place in that dungeon.

I'm sure that there are a lot of good people in Florence. People who go to church, pay their taxes, keep up their property, join the PTA, don't personally rob or murder anyone, and who wouldn't mind if a Black family moved next door. In short, people who try to lead decent lives as responsible citizens. Unfortunately, so did the good Christians and citizens of Nazi Germany.

It's hard for us, fifty years and an ocean away, to understand how the "good" people of Germany could have allowed their government to commit such atrocities in their name. In our own context, however, it's a little easier for us to understand how the "good" people of the USA could allow "our" government to commit such atrocities in our name. For we know how ignorance, fear, apathy, and economic hardship conspire to make "good" people willing, and even eager, to participate in torture and oppression — particularly if they can convince themselves that the people they are torturing really are something less than fully human — as did the "good" people of Florence who actually raised money so that the prison would be built in their back yard.

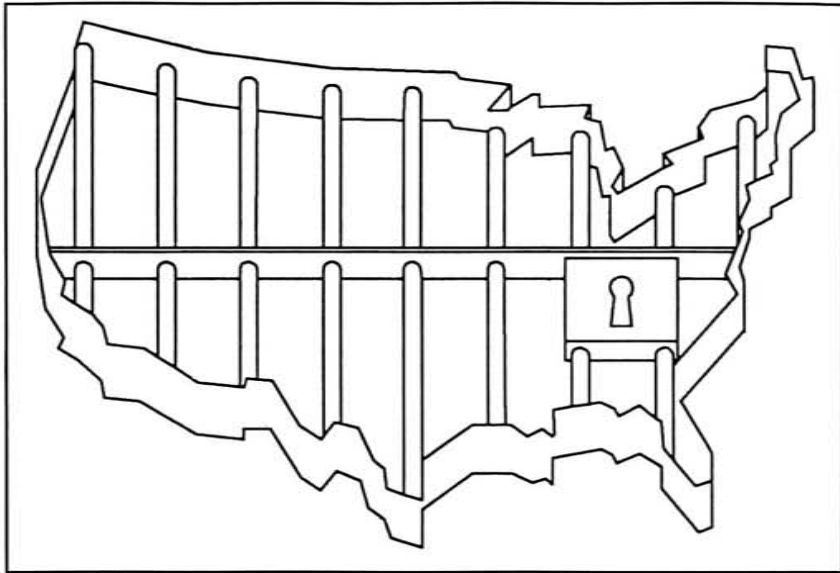
Eventually, the conscience of at least a few people in Nazi Germany was finally awakened. A few people who realized that in the face of such terrible evil, it was not enough simply to be "good" people who go to church, pay their taxes, keep up their property, join the PTA, and refrain from personally robbing or murdering people. People who realized that extraordinary evil demands an extraordinary response.

I don't need to tell you that we are facing just such a time of extraordinary evil in our national life. A time of overt racism — as exemplified in every aspect of the criminally unjust system called by the misnomer of "criminal



Photo by Leslie Di Bendetto Skopek

Many of the participants in the meeting of the National Campaign to Abolish Control Unit Prisons which took place during the weekend of October 21st, 1995 in Chicago, IL.



justice." A time of brutal capitalism which makes even Reaganomics seem "kinder and gentler" in comparison. A time of grave political and ideological repression, as particularly manifest in the proliferation of control unit prisons designed to destroy the spirit.

And, like the good people of Germany, we must choose. We must choose whether we can simply continue going to church, paying our taxes, keeping up our property, joining the PTA, and simply refraining from personal acts of robbery or murder, while allowing the torture and warehousing of a million and a half, mostly Black and Latino and Latina men and women, to continue.

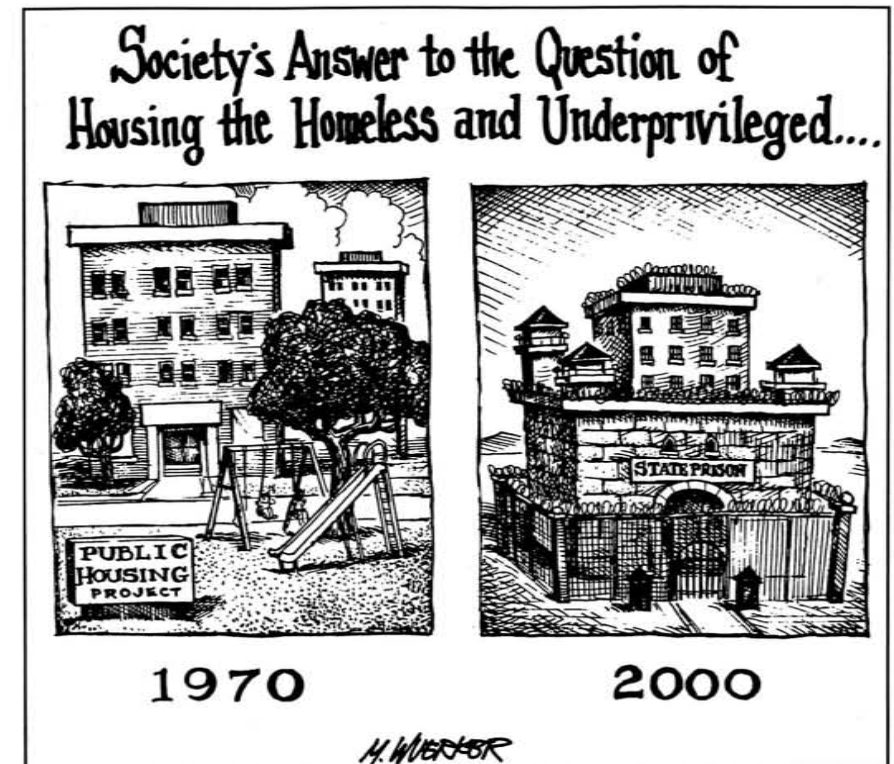
Last December, several organizations involved in addressing various aspects of the criminally unjust penal system decided that it was time to act. At a meeting in Philadelphia convened by the American Friends' Service Committee and greatly inspired by your work here at CEML and the National Committee, we gave birth to a new campaign: The Campaign to Stop Control Unit Prisons. We committed ourselves to monitor conditions in control unit prisons across the country, and seek to resist, and eventually to abolish, all control unit prisons.

Various participating organizations have experienced some successes this year. Three political prisoners at Florence — Oscar López, Tom Manning, and Mutulu Shakur — have begun the transition process out of the control unit at Florence (let's hope, and keep the pressure on, to make sure that this

transition continues!), and Sanyika Shakur is out of prison, although he was not able to be with us in person today. But to be honest, there have been some bumps in the road. We were perhaps unrealistic in our initial plans, and suffered from the lack of an adequate structure to carry the campaign forward as effectively as we would have hoped.

Today, we have been hard at work to create a structure that will make it easier for us to work towards our goal of abolishing all control unit prisons. We have mounted an action campaign against the Marianna control unit prison; are planning another campaign next February on behalf of Ojore Lutalo, who has suffered ten years in isolation; committed ourselves to a coordinated series of hearings and actions across the country to call attention to control unit prisons; and created an emergency network to respond to emergencies pertaining to control unit conditions and prisoners.

Extraordinary evil demands resistance. On behalf of our entire campaign, I hope you will join us in our effort to end this sophisticated hi-tech form of evil in our midst.



H. WUERBER

SANYIKA SHAKUR

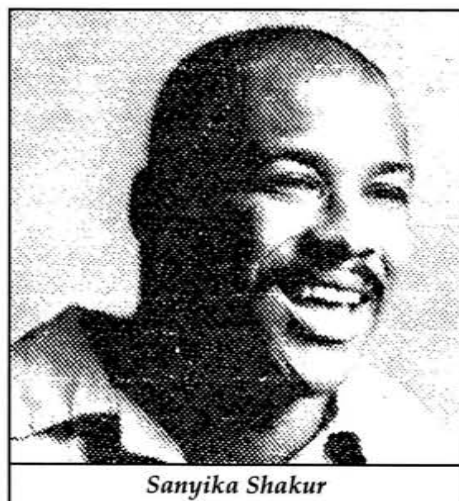
(N. Kurshan): *Sanyika Shakur was formerly known as Monster. His autobiography, Monster, detailing gang life in LA, was on many best seller lists for several months. He was also featured in the best-selling book, Do or Die. While in prison he converted to New Afrikan politics and has since written extensively on the relationship of prisons and white supremacy to the struggle for New Afrikan Independence. He was to speak at our program on this struggle as well as the horror of being caged in one of the worst prisons in the US, the Pelican Bay Special Housing Unit (SHU).*

Sanyika, who was released from Pelican Bay two weeks before the program, was assured by the California Parole Board that he could travel to Chicago. At the last minute, the Parole Board reversed its decision, no doubt understanding the large number of people in Chicago who wanted to meet and hear him. When we found out that Sanyika would not be able to attend the program we asked if he could make a video tape for us. He was able to do this, and the video was shown that night. What follows is the transcript of Sanyika's taped message.

My name is Sanyika Shakur. i am a former New Afrikan political prisoner. i am a citizen of the Republic of New Afrika. i am a member of Spear and Shield Collective, Crossroads Support Network. i'd like to answer a few questions that should be answered about certain aspects of my life, in particular of the last four or five years of my life, and so We'll go through that and explain as much as We can about the situation.

Question: Why are officials in the Department of Corrections not allowing you to travel?

The restrictions placed upon me by the Department of Corrections have been instituted at the highest levels of the Department of Corrections to primarily, i believe, stifle the message of the New Afrikan Independence Movement and the Spear and Shield Collective particularly. Of course it is being euphemized as a need to protect me, to protect them, namely the Department of Corrections and those officials who have deemed my existence outside of prison as a threat. So no doubt about it, the whole issue of curtailing my travel is to not allow me to mingle



MASS INCARCERATION & CONTROL UNITS

or associate with massive amounts of people, and primarily New Afrikan people, people who feel the need to want to change.

Question: Is it that the message you have is so explosive that they fear it?

That could be the case. i think that We have a people who exemplify some type of narcoleptic relationship to politics. By politics i mean all relations centered on the seizure and retention of state power. i'm talking about New Afrikan people having a sleeping disease when it comes to overstanding our need to be politically aware. When anyone comes along and tries to sound the alarm that We need to wake up and shake ourselves of this particular disease, then that individual is deemed a threat and therefore they are shut down. i don't represent anything abnormal about being shut down. A lot of political prisoners and pows are feared by the state of ever getting out for being able to articulate the position to the people of our status and where We need to go, as a people, as a nation, as a movement, as an organization, as a party. They fear what it is i may say, because they say it so much to me over the phone and in person, they fear i may rile up the youth with some kind of subversive rhetoric. So that no doubt is one of their fears.

Question: i understand that you spent four years in a control unit at Pelican Bay State Prison. Can you tell us what that's like?

i spent four years in solitary confinement at Pelican Bay. i was there not as a result of a rules violation, i was there not as a result of anything i had done physically prior to being put there. i was put there primarily because of the politics i stress, i live by. i was deemed a threat to institutional security, i was kept in a control unit, in a cell for 24 hours a day, that includes environmental, social and sensory deprivation. The control unit was pretty much a unit that houses people who exemplify the radical or nontraditional, in the American sense, politics. While there were some criminals there, the majority of people who were there were there as a result of politics, me being one of them. Anyone who asserted themselves politically, consciously, about the exploitation of prisoners or the oppression and genocidal cracking down of nationals, oppressed people, then they tend to be candidates for control units. Pelican Bay is no different than Westville, the control complex at Westville, Indiana, or the MCU at Trenton State or Florence, or previously Marion.

The control unit is to control revolutionary attitudes like the warden once said at Marion. So Pelican Bay as a control unit has worked in one sense and, of course, it has failed in another. It has worked in the sense that it socially isolates politically conscious cats and prevents us from being out among the general population where We can agitate, educate and organize. But in another sense it has concentrated those politically active people in one

SANYIKA SHAKUR

particular place where We still have communication and We still can let the drums beat, and communicate and vibrate and create dialogue and hopefully avenues to rebuild the New Afrikan Independence Movement in correlation with other movements and other organizations with whom We share an identity.

Question: Can you explain the reason behind the proliferation of the control units?

The proliferation of the control units is all in response to the rising consciousness amongst prisoners, or should I say a rising consciousness, because the prisoners, as comrade George once said, prisoners have ample amounts of time to sit and read, to write, to articulate, to vibrate on certain issues that people in society don't have because of full schedules. This is not to say that prisoners don't have full schedules, but there's just more time, and so when you have conscious revolutionaries out amongst people in general population, you have a problem, because there is so much exploitation, workwise, racist abuse by pigs and there is the parasitical prison element which conscious revolutionaries must deal with. You have prisoner organizations that wish to dominate things.

So the control unit and the proliferation of such, is to get those individuals off the general population, out of the mainline, those with identified leadership qualities, politically conscious cats, those who have exhibited jailhouse lawyer potential to help with litigation and to stop repressive tactics like racist repression and genocidal violence. So the proliferation of control units is in response to our potential and things that We have done and they feel that We can do if We ever get ourselves together. And that's why control units, with Pelican Bay being the flagship of a lot of control units, are proliferating from one end of the empire to the next. Control units are definitely intended to isolate those they deem a threat, to make people believe they are incorrigible, because there are no educational, vocational or religious programs in the hole. One is just locked in 23, 22 1/2 hours a day and left alone.



8-cell pod at Pelican Bay SHU.

MASS INCARCERATION & CONTROL UNITS

Windowless cells, low ceilings, walk-alone yards, it's just a technique to try and break the prisoner down and make him or her believe that nothing is possible.

However, the revolutionary spirit continually rises above that, and if one is firm and can remain firm, then one can live through that. However, there are instances where individuals' minds have been broken as a consequence of the social, environmental and sensory deprivation of places like Pelican Bay. The proliferation of control units in a nutshell is primarily to isolate individuals physically, monitor individuals through surveillance of mail and visits, to cosmetically remove what they deem a problem, and have this out of sight, out of mind thing. Because the revolutionary spirit cannot be isolated, cannot be destroyed, cannot be killed by control units, but they figure if they can lock us away, away from general population and those We need to mingle with, the cadres will have a harder time getting to the population, so that's actually what that's about, and that's why there's been a proliferation.

Question: How did you become a New Afrikan Nationalist?

I was initially of course a criminal. I belonged to a street organization. I grew up in South Central and I was captured in 1984 for a crime committed against other New Afrikan people in which a gun battle was the result and some people were wounded. I was put in the hole at San Quentin for 28 months and it was there that I was turned onto the new New Afrikan Independence Movement in general, and the Spear and Shield Collective in particular. I pledged my allegiance then to the independence of the nation, to the New Afrikan ideology, the theory and philosophy of Spear and Shield Collective, and I continued to transform through study and struggle my mentality from criminality to revolutionary nationalism. And I struggled in concert with the brothers who were there, who were conscious, who felt a need to, and the obligation to, raise up cats like myself. So I became a conscious New African citizen in '86, 21 years after the death of Malcolm X, through an invitation by revolutionary brothers who felt that I had the potential to represent the nation, the organization and brothers and sisters at large. So I became a New African nationalist from the heart, because that's where a revolution begins, from the mind, from the people, and I have been struggling ever since, consciously.

Question: What is needed to make the New Afrikan Independence Movement more popular today?

Well, the popularity of any movement depends primarily upon the practice of cadre in conjunction with people. And so in order to root ourselves, to make the movement more viable or more inclusive for massive amounts of

SANYIKA SHAKUR

New Afrikan people, we are going to need to first and foremost get our theory, our philosophy and our ideology in tact. Once cadre have that, overstanding the necessity of these three indispensable components of any revolutionary movement, then they will, or We will, be able to go out among the people and disseminate our particular philosophy through our theory and ideology.

We must have a class-based criteria not just for recruitment but association, overstanding however that the New Afrikan proletariat is a vast amount of people and if We recruit and mingle and deal on a level that is conducive to our struggle, meaning the working class, We will have better results. However, this does not negate the fact that We need to be popular among all classes of New Afrikans, and not just the working class, but primarily the working class, but We also need to have groups in every particular strata of the New Afrikan population. We popularize the movement through practice because this is what people overstand, immediate needs, immediate things that they can see results on hand. People want to feel safe. People don't want to be held hostages in their homes, either by criminals or pigs, by unjust laws or genocidal tactics whether they're perpetrated by whomever.

So to popularize the New African Independence Movement, We're going to have to do leg work. We're going to have to go to people wherever they are and deal with the people. It's the old adage, from the masses to the masses. That's a true axiom. Nothing could ever be closer to the truth and that's the reality of our situation, that's what we must do, and the people as cadres, revolutionaries, it's our obligation. No movement has ever won its struggle unless it was truly popular. And this is what We have to do. Popularize the New Afrikan Independence Movement in every particular age group, every particular strata, every situation our people find themselves in, whether it's in prison or in college, whether Morehouse or Pelican Bay, Florence or Alcorn State, whether it's at DePaul or Juvenile Hall or in the Board Room, We must reach New African people, primarily the working class.

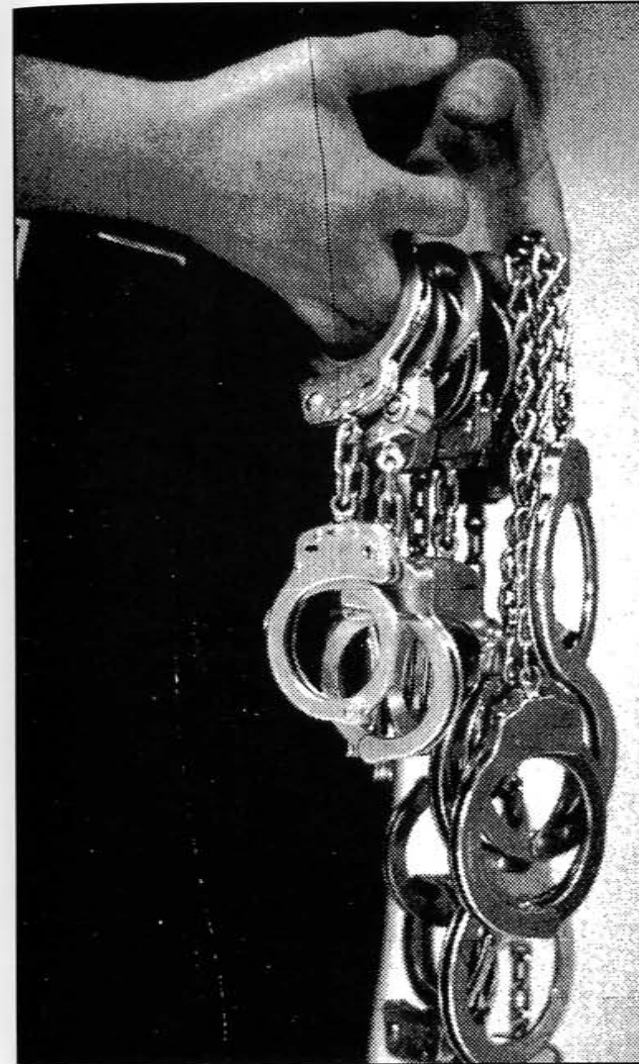
The whole issue of political prisoners and prisoners of war strikes terror in the beast, in the state, in the empire and the imperialists. Comrade George Jackson was a common criminal, a thief on the street, and was captured at the age of 18 and transformed his criminal mentality over an 11 year period to be a revolutionary, to be a representative of working class people. He eventually became a Black Panther and a prisoner of war as a consequence of the struggle that was going on in the prisons at that particular time and at large. Comrade brother Fred Hampton, another brother who was a Panther, who was also murdered, assassinated much like Comrade George Jackson, as a response to the seriousness of what they represented. Fred himself was put in prison because they said he stole ice cream and distributed it among children, \$70 worth of ice cream. He was sentenced to three years in prison

MASS INCARCERATION & CONTROL UNITS

and in fact he was murdered while he was out on bail. But this is the same thing We're talking about.

Brother Malcolm X went to prison a common criminal and transformed his mentality while he was in prison and came out a new man of whom we know today as El Hajj Malik el Shabazz or Malcolm X. Prisoners have the capacity, the ability, like anyone else, to transform themselves to become productive, conscious revolutionaries who, by any means necessary, will struggle to the death like any other person. And this is what the state fears.

So to sum it up and to end it all, for this particular segment, We must support our prisoners of war, our political prisoners and all conscious people who are involved in our movement, in our organization, in our nation. Otherwise the beast will step in with surrogate programs and turn people against us. With that i just



want to say Rebuild! Free the Land! Free all New Afrikan Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War!

JOSE LOPEZ

(N. Kurshan): For many of you here our next speaker needs no introduction. For others, let me say that you are in for a treat. José López has been a leader of the Puerto Rican Independence Movement for at least the past 20 years. He is the Executive Director of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, a leading member of the Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional, and a professor at Northeastern University and Columbia College. It was José López, along with others, who waged the successful campaign that freed the Puerto Rican Nationalists in 1979. José himself spent 7 months in prison as a result of refusing to testify before a federal grand jury investigating the Puerto Rican Independence Movement.

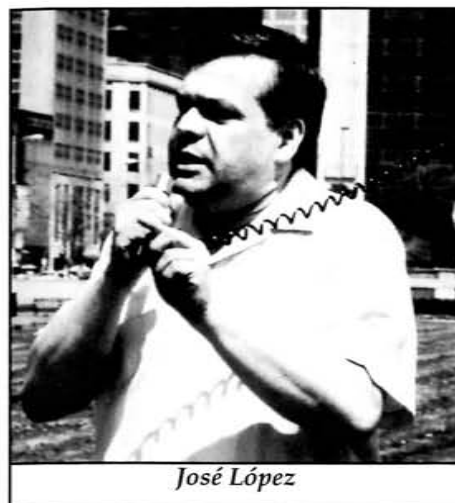
José comes from a strong independentista family. In fact, he is the brother of Oscar López Rivera, one of the Puerto Rican Prisoners of War, who was incarcerated for years at Marion Federal Penitentiary and is now being held at the new state of the art control unit prison in Florence, Colorado. José, along with others, has waged an international campaign to free the Puerto Rican political prisoners ever since their incarceration in the late 1970s. He and the National Committee helped lead scores of demonstrations to the gates of prisons in Kansas, Kentucky, West Virginia, Illinois, as well as to Washington, D.C. and the United Nations. José was a leader of the campaign that resulted in the shutting down of the Lexington Control Unit.

Additionally, José López has been an educational leader, a pioneer in developing theories about prisons as instruments of social control, as well as the spatial deconcentration of the urban centers. José has been at the center of a vision that has led to the creation of amazing institutions in the Puerto Rican community — Pedro Albizu Campos High School, Centro Infantil Childcare Center, Pedro Albizu Campos Puerto Rican History & Culture Museum, Vidal/Sida HIV/Aids Prevention Project and the Borinquen Bakery. He has been one of the main architects of a plan to stabilize the Puerto Rican community in Chicago and stave off the rampant gentrification.

After such a glowing introduction, and following these three great presentations, it is quite difficult for me to speak. I'm usually not lost for words, but I find myself in that kind of awkward situation. Perhaps it is because the people that have spoken to you tonight are people that I consider my very good friends and I hold in such high regard that my emotions run high. I feel it is a privilege to share the panel with Rev. Nozomi Ikuta and Dr. Alan Berkman.

Alan Berkman is one of those rare people whose many deeds will never be known. He is one of those people whose lives have touched many of us and who has done a great deal, but only those who have been very close, only those who have received benefits, would ever be able to attest to them. Alan

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José López

Berkman is a doctor who has helped many, many people, including one of our great freedom fighters, Guillermo Morales, and I'm honored to present to you, and we should all be honored to have with us not only Alan Berkman, but Guillermo Morales' and Dylcia Pagán's son, Guillermo Morales. *(Applause)* Guillermo is now living in Cuba with many other revolutionaries, including the great Black Nationalist leader, Assata Shakur. Dylcia Pagan, as most of you know, is in prison. She is one of the Puerto Rican POWs in prison in FCI Dublin.

As I listened to Alan's presentation I thought about how each one of us experiences certain things that only that individual can attest to. I rarely speak about my personal problems or suffering or about my family, but I thought it was important to talk about a very personal experience. Some of you probably know that my mother is suffering from Alzheimer's and some of you also know that my brother Oscar has a grand daughter who is also the grand daughter of Carmen Valentín, one of those coincidences. An important coincidence. The last time that my mother was fully conscious after visiting Oscar in Marion, when she came home the first thing she told me was that she had not been able to touch my brother and how much she wanted to do it. Now she hasn't been able to do that in many years, but this last time was very significant to her, because she was aware that something really wrong was happening to her.

This summer, Lourdes, my niece, went to visit Oscar in Florence with Karina, my brother's grand daughter. And she said that in the visit Karina had put her hand against the glass, and Oscar had put his hands against the glass and Karina told him, "let's imagine that we're touching each other." Now this is a five year old kid. I share this with you for several reasons: One is the obvious, the problem of the dehumanization process control units create in a human being and in the human experience. I also share this with you because in Karina exists all the possibilities of imagining and in my mother there is no possibility of imagining. A few days ago, I visited her in Puerto Rico, and yet it's very interesting: of all the family, the only one that she remembers is my brother, Oscar. And so in one way, both my mother and my niece are real examples of the triumph of the human spirit — the almost

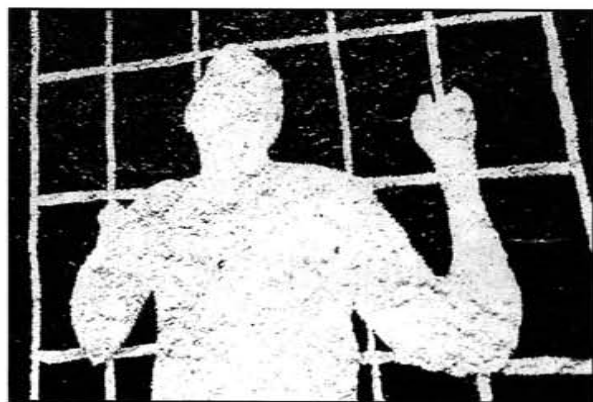
JOSE LOPEZ

unexplainable and yet very explainable possibilities of the human being of confronting tremendous odds and being able to come out of those odds with some deep, profound human senses and human emotions.

I just finished browsing through an article that appeared today in the *Chicago Tribune* magazine. The article is entitled "The FALN Dossier, How Local Bombers Became a Cause Celebre." It's an article about the Puerto Rican political prisoners and POWs. And one of the things that struck me was the ending, the last few words of the article. The author ends by saying,

"Will Clinton grant the FALN a pardon or not? Probably not. At a minimum the FALN will have to renounce armed violence and agree to pursue their goal of Puerto Rico independence peacefully. So Torres, Rodríguez and Rosa are likely to spend more years in prison, until the memory of their actions fades from public consciousness, until releasing them no longer carries a heavy domestic political cost, until society can be certain that the FALN's war is finally over."

But there was another interesting revelation, made before by the author of this article Gary Marx: "No polls have been taken in Puerto Rico or the United States to gauge public support for a pardon, but many scholars say a majority of Puerto Ricans in the US and on the island would support the release of the FALN." It's very interesting. It's interesting because the basic conclusion by the author of this article is that the Puerto Rican political prisoners have a long way to go before they can hope to come out. But it's



also saying something — if they want to come out, they will come out on the conditions which the US government wants to impose. Gary Marx does not really understand that the Puerto Rican political prisoners and prisoners of war are the representatives of a captive nation; the representatives of anti-

colonial struggle; the representatives of an unresolved historical problem.

In 1979 we celebrated the release of the Puerto Rican Nationalists here in

MASS INCARCERATION & CONTROL UNITS

Chicago. For many years, people had told the Nationalists to seek parole, to ask forgiveness. They didn't and today Lolita Lebrón and Rafael Cancel Miranda walk the streets of Puerto Rico as free human beings, never having to have said they were sorry. They had nothing to feel sorry about. They were engaged in a struggle against a crime against humanity — colonialism. This past weekend I had the opportunity to be with Rafael Cancel Miranda, one of the Puerto Rican Nationalists who was released.

This issue about prisons in America, the issue that prisons in America reflect a very serious problem, and that is the problem that America is a colonial power; that America is an empire, and obviously what we see in its prisons is a reflection of that imperialism. If there are right now 1.5 million people in prisons and jails in this country and nearly 70% of those people happen to be people of color, and there are 1.5 million people at the graduate level of higher education across the country, and if about 80% of those graduate students in this country happen to be white, there is a real bell curve in America. Without a doubt, America's prisons reflect America's reality. When you ask a people that they should renounce their right to be free, you can ask it of them, you can even impose it on them, but what happens is that you can never get the problem resolved that way, because, and I often tell this to my students: that while history does not repeat itself historical problems insist on being resolved because historical problems, like individual problems, insist on being resolved. Now if any one of us has a deep psychological problem that's bothering us, at some point we have to address that problem because it will keep on surfacing until we are able to resolve it. And the same thing happens with historical problems.

The issue of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the balkanization of Europe is not the repetition of history. There are some deep seated historical problems that Yugoslavia was not able to resolve, and while Tito may have been able to keep a lid on those problems, the fact is that those problems smolder and what is happening today is a reminder that they were not resolved, and that they need to be resolved. The same thing happened in what was the Soviet Union. The same thing is happening in Rwanda. The same thing happens across the world when historical problems are not addressed. We talk about 190 countries in the world, today. As a matter of fact, there are at least 3,000 nationalities in the world that insist on resolving their national questions. And there is no way to get around this. You have to address it.

One of the problems you have in America is precisely the problem of addressing, honestly and critically, historical problems. In 1903 DuBois wrote in his book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, "the problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line." And we're entering the 21st century and the problem of the 21st century also seems to be the problem of the color line. And when you look at America's prisons you are obviously looking at the

JOSE LOPEZ

problem of the color line. And DuBois made another very interesting observation. He said, "the nation is not yet at peace with its past sins." The nation is not yet at peace with its past sins. What are the nation's past sins? Obviously it's colonialism and racism. Anyone who wants to talk about racism as an individual act is crazy. I don't care how you relate to any person of color or how that person relates to you. The problem of racism is not resolved. I don't care how many intermarriages there are, the problem of racism is not resolved. I don't care how many cocktail parties Black people and Latinos, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans and whites go to together, the problem of racism is not resolved.

Because the problem of racism is not an individual problem. It is not a problem that we can sit around and resolve. It is a problem that the society has to resolve. It is a problem that can only be resolved when those oppressed nationalities fully exercise the human right of self-determination. And, if those people cannot exercise the right of self-determination, we can go on *ad infinitum* talking about racism and trying to come up with some quick fix solutions as to how we address these issues of the gap between Black and white America. There is no way to do it unless you are honestly and truthfully committed to analyzing the history of this country; the fact that this country's wealth was built on the seizure of Indian lands, on the appropriation of the labor of Black people, on the expropriation of 51% of Mexico's land, on the occupation of Puerto Rico, Samoa, Guam and Hawaii.

Unless we're able to acknowledge that Reconstruction was carried out by Black people, Reconstruction was done primarily by Black people in prison after 1865. If you study the prison population between 1865 and 1900 in the South, you will see an incredible swelling of the prison population in the deep South. Black people came out of slavery and were literally transported to prisons. With the chain gangs, they rebuilt the mines and the cities, and the railroads and ports of the South. In the South, Reconstruction was not done by white people. It was done by slave labor from the prisons. That's why the 13th amendment to the Constitution doesn't really end slavery. It ends chattel slavery, for it clearly states, "Slavery and involuntary servitude shall forever be abolished from these United States, except when duly convicted." Today there are 5 million people in this country who have been duly convicted and are now under some aspect of the penal system. There are 1.5 million people in prisons and jails in this country right now who are literally civil slaves. So, if any one wants to talk about the Puerto Rican political prisoners having to say they are sorry they better think again. For it is the US empire which has to ask for forgiveness in order to enter the process of reconciliation.

But, if we are going to talk about the possibilities of reconciliation, that can only happen (and I'm sure that Rev. Ikuta knows this very well and that

MASS INCARCERATION & CONTROL UNITS

most of the religious people know this well) that there can be no reconciliation unless there is a process of confession, penance, retribution and atonement. The first thing a sinner must do is confess his or her sins. Right? (Applause) So America has to confess its sins, and then America must do something else. Once you confess your sins, what do you do? You do penance! And after you do penance you do what else? Pay retribution!

And then you can have atonement.

But atonement can not be done by Black people, and it can not be done by Puerto Ricans (or by the Puerto Rican freedom fighters), and it cannot be done by Mexicans. Atonement must first take place as a response by



Prisoners protest a lockdown by sending back lunch.

white America and the white power structure of this society acknowledging its historical sin — its past sins. And so if we are to deal with this issue of prisons and jails, and if we are to honestly look at the issue of control units (and I think you've gotten a pretty good idea about what control units are about and why they exist), then we have to really be able to study the history of this country, to see clearly that in order for this country to begin to resolve its problems it must, as DuBois says, be at peace with itself. And the only way to be at peace with itself is to confess its sins. And we all know what those past sins are — colonialism and racism. It means we have to undo a lot of things in America because we cannot continue. What the O.J. Simpson trial proved, what the Million Man March to Washington proved, is the fact that America is extremely divided, and that Black people and white people are speaking in different languages, and they hear different drums— obviously Black people better, because they have a history of being able to understand the drum.

I think that when we look at where prisons are going and without a doubt America's prisons are becoming America's concentration camps. We have talked a great deal about the concentration camps, and people talk about the immorality of concentration camps, but the fact is that concentration camps in Nazi Germany were economic centers of production, and when we talk

JOSE LOPEZ

about the fact that the people of Florence really like the control unit because they benefit from it, and the people in Westville like the control unit because they benefit from it. We are talking about prison as economic enterprise; we are talking about a prison-industrial complex.

We have traveled across this country to demonstrate. We went to Alderson, West Virginia. Alderson, West Virginia has a population of 300 people and the day we marched there everybody locked their doors, except for the F.B.I., National Guard and every repressive agency, but not a single resident of Alderson because the people of Alderson live off the misery of the women's prison there. Alderson (Davis Hall, the control unit there) was one of the first control units for women, and we closed it down. And we went to Lexington, and we did the same thing. And in Lexington, the day we went, there were no people there because many of the people in Lexington make their livelihood from the prison. And we closed down the Lexington control unit. And in the process we prevented the Marianna control unit for women from being constructed.

Unfortunately we haven't been so successful with Florence. But I think we have registered a few successes this year, and Nozomi already pointed some of these out. Small but important. And I think we can have other examples that will ultimately insure that we can collectively make some changes. These are not definitive changes. But I think as Alan so well testified to, the fact is that sometimes small things like writing a letter, like making a phone call, the smallest things sometimes we cannot imagine, can have incredible consequences. And while it may appear to us that we are powerless, I think it's important for you to remember that in the case of Karina she could imagine playing with my brother and being able to touch him despite the glass that divided them. And if this little girl could imagine that, it means that we could collectively imagine a lot of things. We can even imagine ourselves realistically being free. And freedom is nothing more than this.

Freedom is nothing more than the possibility of human beings understanding the world about them, acting responsibly upon that world and, most importantly, transforming that world. That's what freedom is about. For freedom can only take place within a human context. When every human being can freely undertake that process. And today thousands, millions of people in this world are not able to do that because of the system that was created about 500 years ago based on greed and racism — the system of colonialism. Interestingly enough, if you look at the history of prisons and you look at the history of capitalism, they coincide. The first modern prison was built in Amsterdam, the Rasphaus in 1595, to imprison the thousands of people who were fleeing from the feudal small villages to the city because there was a saying at that time, "the air of the city makes a person free." But as they came to the city they didn't find freedom. What they found were

MASS INCARCERATION & CONTROL UNITS

prisons because the city's population was so great, there were no jobs, so the only option was population control. So from the beginning, prisons were centers for social control. And without a doubt, we are entering the 21st century and we're entering with prisons becoming America's concentration



camps— just as they were in Germany — centers of production, centers of exploitation and super-exploitation. Without a doubt, prisons are becoming America's most incredible capitalist experiment, because you can guarantee a free labor force, you can guarantee the possibilities of not having strikes and all kinds of things— factories with fences which by the year 2000 will produce \$8.9

billion in profits. Already prisoners make jeans for K-Mart, rocking ponies for Eddie Bauer, and uniforms for McDonalds. Control units are going to be used more arbitrarily for those who resist this movement.

Only when America is forced to face the reality of acknowledging its historical sins of colonialism, and only when oppressed nationalities within this prison house of nationalities — the US federal system — freely exercise the right of self-determination "can the nation be at peace with its past sins." But, a small and significant step towards that end, is for the society to see the further incarceration of young people of color as a continuation of that colonial legacy and TO STOP IT; another small but significant step is to take on the prison industrial complex and TO STOP BUILDING MORE PRISONS (particularly control units); and still another, small but significant step, is to FREE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS AND PRISONERS OF WAR from its prisons.

In the meantime, the human spirit and the human virtue of resilience is such (as evidenced in Karina and even my mother) that in the last few days, you have seen some very interesting uprisings across the land in the prisons that they thought were the most secure, including here in Illinois. As I heard the news, I wondered whether we would be accused of conspiracy, as we were here tonight celebrating this activity on control units and the human spirit and the will to confront and resist them.

Thank you.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE

from the

COMMITTEE TO END THE MARION LOCKDOWN

<u>Item</u>	<u>Price</u>
The Continuing Crime of Black Imprisonment - Control units sit on top of the U.S. prison system which incarcerates Black people at a rate five times more often than did apartheid era South Africa. And this imprisonment does not prevent crime. So what is its purpose? This article describes the racist nature of imprisonment in this country.	\$1
The Prison Quiz - Asks and answers the main questions people are posing about prisons, the questions that, if left unanswered, myths are made of.	Free
Reflections on Ten Years of the Lockdown - People who are or who have been prisoners at Marion speak out on how the lockdown impacted their lives and what control units mean politically. Assembled on the tenth anniversary of the lockdown.	\$5
Walkin' Steel - CEML's semi-annual newsletter, devoted to abolishing control units, containing documents and reports about the control unit prison in Florence, CO. Much information; good analysis. Contributions are requested for subscriptions.	\$2/issue
From Alcatraz to Marion to Florence: Control Unit Prisons in the U.S. Two members of CEML have written this extensive analysis of control unit prisons. Included is a partial list of such prisons, a definition of them and some suggestions for combating these prisons.	\$3
Amnesty International Report - The first time ever that AI condemned a U.S. prison. This report demonstrates that "there is hardly a rule [in the U.N.'s Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners] that is not infringed in some way or another" at Marion.	\$3
Poster - "From Attica to Marion to Florence, the Inhumanity Will Continue Unless We Stop It!" 3 colors, 18" x 24"; designed to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the great Attica prison rebellion and to remind us all of the need to fight against the brutality of prisons.	\$10

(Continued next page.)

VIDEOS AVAILABLE FROM CEML

<u>Title</u>	<u>Price</u>
Shut Down the Control Units! Video - This 30-minute, professionally-produced video discusses the conditions at Marion, the history of control unit prisons, their relationship to U.S. society in general and racism in particular, and some ways in which we can work to abolish them forever.	\$33
"20/20" Show on Marion - This segment from March, 1988 vividly demonstrates the violence of the prison using never seen before footage from inside the prison. It includes interviews with prisoners who describe their innermost fear and fury.	\$12
Attica - This movie, made in the early seventies, documents the great rebellion that took place at Attica prison from September 9 - 13, 1971. This 81 minute film has become one of the most important documents in the history of the prison movement. Now essentially unavailable on film, it has been converted to video by CEML.	\$53
CNN on the Just-Opened Control Unit at Florence and 60 Minutes on the Control Unit at Pelican Bay - Brutality piled upon brutality is exposed. Both segments on one tape.	\$15
Program on the Racist Imprisonment Binge - Featuring Jerome Miller, well-known anti-prison activist, Randy Stone, law professor, and Carlos Vega, prisoner for 13 years. All address the evils of mass incarceration at a program in Chicago attended by 400 people.	\$15

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Alan Berkman is a former political prisoner who served two years at Marion Federal Prison and eight years altogether. He has been a revolutionary since the 1960s. As a physician, he has always placed the needs of people first; whether it was at Wounded Knee, the South Bronx, Lowndes County (Alabama), or from one of his prison cells. Inside, he gives a first hand account of time in Marion, the first control unit prison.

Nozomi Ikuta is a minister with Liberation Ministries, United Church Board for Homeland Ministries of the United Church of Christ. She is an active member of the "The National Campaign to Stop Control Unit Prisons" and discusses the emergence of this new organization and how you can become involved.

Sanyika Shakur was a prisoner at Pelican Bay Special Housing Unit (SHU) having been released in September, 1995. Shakur was formerly known as Monster. His autobiography, Monster, detailing gang life in LA, was on many best seller lists for several months. He was also featured in the best-selling book, Do or Die. While in prison he converted to New Afrikan politics and has since written extensively on the relationship of prisons and white supremacy to the struggle for New Afrikan Independence. He will speak on this struggle as well as the horror of being caged in one of the worst prisons in the U.S.

Jose Lopez is a spokesperson for the Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional Puertorriqueño, Executive Director of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, and a leading member of the Puerto Rican Independence Movement. He is also a professor at Northeastern and Columbia Universities and served almost a year in jail for Grand Jury resistance. He will speak on mass incarceration as a social control mechanism of people of color.



Committee to End the Marion Lockdown

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