REFLECTIONS ON TEN YEARS OF THE LOCKDOWN AT USP MARION

The following pages contain reflections of people who have been prisoners at Marion -- or who are now prisoners at Marion -- on what they think of that experience. These have been written for commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the Lockdown, October 27, 1993.

Some of the people who responded did so from their cells at Marion, others did so from their cells at other prisons, and still others are no longer in prison. We salute them all and thank them for their time, energy and courage.

As with many communications with prisoners, some who have written for this collection are known to CEML only through their letters.

Unfortunately, many people we asked for reflections have not yet responded. We suspect that some of the prison mail did not make it through. As always, that is a serious loss.

The reflections appear in the order that they were received by CEML.

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PO Box 578172
Chicago, IL 60657-8172
(312) 235-0070

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RAFAEL CANCEL MIRANDA
(no longer in prison, may be reached thru CEML)

(On November 17, 1991 Rafael, who was a prisoner at Marion from 1971 to 1979, gave the concluding address to a day-long conference devoted to stopping the Florence Control Unit. The following are excerpts from that speech. Those present alternately laughed and cried as Rafael wove a tale of courage, strength and determination. No transcription could ever adequately convey what Rafael says.)

When I went into prison, they gave me a very big honor. They didn't like me. They sent me straight to Alcatraz, straight from court. I went to Alcatraz 24 years old. I came out when I was 30 years old. Then I went to Leavenworth. They put me in isolation in Leavenworth for 5 months because they said I lead a strike. By that time I was already locked up for 16 years. If after 16 years I was good enough, strong enough, to still organize a strike, then Alcatraz did nothing to me.

Because of that strike they sent me as a punishment to Marion. They charged me with being the leader of the strike. When I went to Marion they sent me straight to the hole (solitary confinement). They told me they sent me to Marion because I had too many friends. Can you imagine them punishing someone for having too many friends?

At Marion we held another strike and for some reason they charged me again for being a leader of the strike and put me in solitary. That was the time, right there and then, when they first created the Control Unit. That happened in 1972. It was just solitary confinement at first, but they transformed it into a Control Unit, the Control Unit that we know today but really not as bad as it is today. I spent 18 months in the Control Unit. Within that space of time many people killed themselves there. Many also went crazy. They used to give prolixin, thorazine and valium. Once you get hooked into that, forget it; you're not your own man or woman any more.

I was in the Control Unit where Oscar is today. When the prolixin and the thorazine and the valium don't work, they beat you. They use the big stick. It was common for them to beat a prisoner in the Control Unit and then say he killed himself. Quite a few prisoners killed themselves like that.

It was at that time when I was in the Control Unit that I met the people in Chicago. Then the battle to free us really started. People from Chicago like Carmen Valentin, Carlos Alberto Torres, Lucy and Alicia Rodriguez, all the brothers and sisters who are in prison now, we owe it all to them. We are enjoying ourselves talking here today thanks to them. They kept moving. They put heart in it. In this type of struggle, you don't go half way. If you don't go all the way, then get the heck out of the way because you are going to be an obstacle. They started moving here in Chicago and from Chicago to New York. And in a few years, that small group of people had the case of the 5 Puerto Rican Nationalists all around the world. It was

all across the world, and it all started right here with a group like you. That's why I know the power of a group of people like you. When you really work, you can shake the power of the whole United States system. 500 people. 200 people even. They underestimate us, but that's good. That means we can make big surprises.

When I was in prison, they were talking about opening a behavior modification prison in Butner, North Carolina already. Just like they're talking now about Florence. And then a group of people started fighting against Butner, and we won. They never opened Butner.

We can stop Control Units. We can stop Florence because we have the strength. We have to have the confidence. The only way we can stop nothing is if we do nothing. That is the worst defeat we can have. Doing nothing. Sometimes we get scared. We think they are too overpowering. They are not that strong. Superman and Rambo are fiction. Fiction. *You can do it. I know it.*

If somebody can stop control units, if somebody can stop Florence, if somebody could even change the system in the long run, these are the kinds of people who could do it. This is the type of people. You are the ones who could do it. I know that some day it will depend not on them, but us. How soon it happens will depend on us. We will hear Leonard Peltier from here, from this podium. We will hear Oscar Lopez from here. We will hear Carmen Valentin. We can do it.

All we have to do is have confidence in ourselves. When we are together, we are powerful. They are the weak ones. They are the minority, but they let us believe that they are the powerful ones. If we get organized, we can change the whole system. We have the power. When we get together as one people, George Bush will wind up running away from us. They ask themselves, what the heck makes a man be like Luis Rosa? What makes a woman be like Carmen Valentin? Carmen Valentin is such a little person but with such power, such strength. They can not understand us. They can not understand humanity.

When I'm with you, you are all my people. I feel one with you. Thank you very much and keep on.

SUNDIATA ACOLI/New Afrikan POW
aka Clark Squire #39794-066
PO Box 1000
Leavenworth, KS 60648

i was a prisoner at Marion from October 1979 to July 1987. i was sent to Marion, Illinois from Trenton State Prison, New Jersey because of the political nature of my conviction which was to survive an ambush by State Troopers on the New Jersey Turnpike in 1973. The ambush triggered a shoot-out which resulted in the death of my comrade Zayd Shakur and one State Trooper, the wounding of my other comrade Assata Shakur and another State Trooper, the capture of Assata and myself, and my subsequent sentencing to life imprisonment at Trenton State Prison (TSP).

At TSP i was immediately put in the Management Control Unit and locked down for 5 years, 23 1/2 hours per day, in a cell smaller than the legal space requirement for a large German Shephard dog. Because the U.S. Government wanted their turn at punishing me, i was taken out of the New Jersey State Prison system in 1979 and sent to Marion Federal Penitentiary, Illinois although i had no federal conviction, sentence or charges.

When i arrived at Marion it was a "general population" prison. All prisoners there, except those in Lock-down Units, could circulate freely thru out the prison. Yet rumors were rife even then that the entire prison was scheduled to be converted into the lock-down complex for the federal prison system. Prisoners had somehow managed to get copies of the official minutes of a meeting by national prison administrators which discussed their future plans for Marion's conversion into a total lock-down prison.

Contrary to official propaganda, most prisoners at Marion then, and now, had little or no history of violence in prison. The average Marion prisoner was someone who had demonstrated a certain amount of sophistication in their previous line of "work", or someone who was influential before their imprisonment, or had gained influence after imprisonment, or someone who had been convicted of an act which was of a "radical" political nature.

From 1979 onwards, the administration slowly tightened the screws on Marion for no apparent reason. Guard harassment and provocation steadily increased. One by one privileges were taken away until by 1980 prisoners felt they had no alternative but to call a brief work strike to air their grievances. The strike gained not the slightest concession but was rudely rebuffed by prison officials who refused to dicker with strike leaders. Instead more privileges were taken away, guard harassment increased, and prisoner resistance stiffened. Other work strikes followed, each longer than it's predecessor. Yet each strike was met with rebuff, increased hostility and brutality by prison staff, and a disinformation campaign to the press. Altho prisoner resistance to guard brutality stiffened, prisoners also began fighting among themselves. By 1983 tensions had risen sky high. The entire prison was ready to

explode in an orgy of violence, fratricidal or otherwise, when suddenly that October two guards were stabbed to death in H-Unit.

As if on cue, officials locked down the entire prison, imported the most brutal guards from each penitentiary thru out the U.S., and turned them loose upon prisoners at Marion. For 9 months wolf packs of guards in full riot gear roamed the prison, randomly attacking prisoners at will, and beat them senseless. Marion has been locked down ever since, its conversion into a lock-down complex for the entire federal prison system complete, as planned.

LUIS ENRIQUE GRANT, #05103-069
PO Box 1000
Marion IL 62959

I have been in Marion since November 7, 1991. Well I guess you know that I'm aware that this is not the best of all possible places to live. You also know that I thank the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown for trying to cushion the shocks and strains that has made it a lot harder to endure. I don't think it necessary for me to burden you with the listing of the strains I have endured. You are intelligent enough to know. At each phase of this long train of tyrannies, we have conducted ourselves in a very meek and civilized manner, with only polite pleas for justice and moderation, all to no avail. We have shown a noble indisposition to react with the passion that each new oppression engenders. But any fool should be able to see that this cannot be allowed to continue and that nature allows no such imbalances as this to exist for long. We have petitioned for judicial redress, demonstrated and protested before the administrators. Don't make me waste my time and energy winning you to a position that you should already support with all your sympathies. The same forces that bomb Iraq and Panama are the one that threaten me. You are charged with the responsibility of acknowledging the truth, my friend, and supporting it with whatever means are in your power. You will never falter or waiver before the task, but you will go forward -- to resolve this conflict once and forever.

"Power to the People"
"God Bless You"

JOSE ORTEGA, # 61910-098
PO Box 1000
Marion, IL 62959

This place called USP-Marion is nothing less than a concentration camp, where a human laboratory has been created by the most evil viruses. They use all kinds of psychological games to drive the prisoner to the limits of his sanity until he loses it.

They just don't only play with the prisoner and make him suffer by subjecting him to their destructive and evil games, but they also subject his friends and family to their games without any remorse.

They use every method to break him down so just he forgets that he is a human being. Because what they want is for the prisoner to become nothing less than a piece of meat. After ten long years of this lock down my eyes have seen people driven to insanity and for to be totally stripped of their fundamental rights and beliefs by their injustice and madness. I've become aware during these hard years who is the real criminal and monsters. We have been subjected to this hidden house of terrors and they have been able to get away with all their injustices.

I consider myself lucky because I have been able to stay alive and aware of my own being. I've continued to keep my morals and principals as a human being. I would like to take this opportunity to express my respects and thanks to each member of CEML for their support and care they've given us during these difficult and hard years.

Your amigo sincerely.

JAMES OWENS,# 00305-131
PO Box 1000
Marion, IL 62959

To the American Public:

I have been at U.S.P. Marion since April 12th 1982, and was moved to FCI Butner in North Carolina for ten days and returned to Marion on the sole basis that a case manager didn't want me at Butner despite the fact that the Director, Mr. Norman A. Carlson, ordered that I be maintained at Butner. This was in 1987.

The conditions here at Marion are such as to induce hatred; murder and total psychological dissimilation of an inmate's psych factor. The American tax payer should be more than ashamed of themselves for funding such an operation as Marion.

There is no such thin as compassion within the Administrative operation at Marion. In fact, witnessing the destruction of inmates by staff has become a spectacle. Imagine your most irresponsible and reckless behavior ever, in your life ?!? You might describe Marion. Learn to be humane and impress a fellow American. Close Marion.

Respectfully,

SCOTT A. ROUTLEDGE/a.k.a. FOUNTAIN, #02158-090
PO Box 1000
Marion, IL 62959

I was a prisoner at Marion from September of 1984 to August of 1991 and am again incarcerated here since July of 1992 till the present.

Reflections, what a dirty word. When I see my reflection it reminds me of the fact that I had just turned 24 before coming here. I'll be 34 in a few months and in this time I've lost my hair, grown a bear full of grey, and have grown lumps (tumors) all over my body from the wonderful water here.

If I had to use on word (or two) to sum up the Marion experience it would have to be Kafka-esque. A world without rhyme or reason, to the inmates at least. Of course there is a reason on the larger scales of things and that is the creating of a police-state. Can't have one of those without destroying bail, habeas-corpus, and the 4th Amendment's search and seizure. Oh, and "lock-down" prisons of course to guarantee a place to put unruly dissenters and various other undesirables. But the average inmate is merely trying to figure out what he did to come here, or at least what he did that 80,000 other federal inmates aren't doing.

That's why I call it Kafka-esque. The B.O.P.'s extensive use of "confidential-informants", and its policy of fostering widespread paranoia on the prison populace throughout the B.O.P., has led to the state of affairs that exists today. Also, I can't consider Marion without its evil twin, the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals which I like to all "The Dark Citadel". There could be no Marion without the 7th Circuit. Perhaps the greatest center of repression in the United States is not in Marion, but Chicago, Illinois.

We inmates look to the public as sheep look toward their shepherd, we're crying wolf but you don't see him. That doesn't mean the wolf's not there. He's just wearing sheep's clothing so you don't see him. We can't understand why you don't see him but we see him and we smell him, and he stinks like death and repression.

KOJO BOMANI SABABU, New Afrikan (POW)
aka Grailing Brown #39384-068
PO Box 1000
Lewisburg, PA 17837

I was a prisoner at Marion from June 86 til July 90, and July 92 until October 92. During both sentences to Marion I saw no demonstrable changes, only modifications for legal enactment of repression.

USP-Marion's intended purposes were to circumvent violence within the federal bureau of prisons. This has never occurred and it was utilized to house political prisoners, jailhouse lawyers, and prisoner rights advocates. Indeed, a few cases of assaults and escape attempts were sentenced and housed at Marion, but the majority of the prisoners who have been and are still housed there fit into the stated category.

The greatest falsehood established by the bureau of prisons is the notion that rehabilitative programing exists at Marion to alter particular behavior patterns nonproductive to society and the prison system. Marion is simply a "warehouse" for human beings, used as an experiment to deny human rights under the guise of modifying behavior defects in alleged criminals. When the propaganda machine of the U.S. Justice Department departs with statements such as "the worst of the worst, bunch of rotten apples, hardnose criminals," etc., it allows the bureau of prisons to exact any type of punishment upon men incarcerated there with impunity.

I personally applaud the efforts of the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown with their sacrifice and courage over the years, exposing universally the repression within the prison systems of this country.

BRO. AHMED IBN MUHAMMAD
aka Bro. Claud x Gray, #04550-050
PO Box 1000
Marion, Illinois 62959

I was a prisoner at Marion from December 30, 1981 to July 1, 1982, when I was taken back to New Jersey under the Interstate Agreement Act on Detainers. I was returned to Marion ten months later, on April 14, 1983, in time for the events that led up to the total lockdown, that turned Marion Federal Penitentiary into a Segregation Complex, commonly called the Nation's first Control Unit Prison. I was one of the few fortunate Marion prisoners that was sent to Marion from MCC (Metropolitan Correctional Center) as an original destination, and was later transfered for that reason, to clean up lies that were being told by then Warden Jerry Williford, who took over after the lockdown, and Warden Harold G. Miller was sent to Lewisburg Penitentiary. To begin, I was sent to Marion by U.S. District Judge Herbert Stern for a series of verbal exchanges between he and I during a RICO trial for a series of Bank Robberies in 1981. I've never seen anything on paper to verify the reason I was sent to Marion, but I had 16 co-defendants, and I wasn't the leader, or even a high ranking officer of our group, the New World Nation of Islam; but me and Judge Stern's chemistry in that courtroom created antipathy between us, and I got the bitter end of the stick. When I arrived at Marion, the place was on semi-lockdown status. There was no Prison Factory to work in, and the only jobs were as orderlies and a few food service jobs. It was obvious that Marion was a place in transition because every incident that happened was responded to by Warden Miller with the curtailment of some privilege. It was like he was a deranged parent waiting for the child to do something wrong so he could give it a brutal lesson.

Most of you know that on October 23, 1983, in Marion's notorious Control Unit, two officers were killed, one that morning and one that afternoon, by two men who had been harassed to the point where they decided there was no holds barred, and no looking back. Strangely, this happened on the same day that 241 U.S. Marines and more than 40 French Paratroopers were killed in separate explosions in Beirut, Lebanon; and, this was the first day of Scorpio, the Astrological sign that represents death and regeneration. Four days later, another serious incident happened. A convict was killed by another convict in a knife fight, and the atmosphere was tense, because it involved a Black and a White Convict. We were being let out for dinner a half of a Block at a time and by the time it was C-Unit's time to eat dinner, it was 7:30 p.m. We were hungry and tired of the B.S. When the A and C side (tiers) of C-Block were let out to walk, escorted by a mob of officers, to dinner at the mess hall, a fight broke out between a convict named Joe James (from D.C.) and an officer, and others joined in the melee. After that, the B and D side (where I was) was not let out to eat. They called lock in and several convicts on both sides of C-Block yelled back and forth at each other to decide whether we were going to go to our cells or not. We decided to go in and later on they brought us some real disrespectful Bologna sandwiches. So we trashed and burned everything we could light and throw out on

the range. After that night, the nightmare that is now Marion Control Unit Prison, began.

I was transfered out of Marion on January 15, 1985. The administration lied so much in telling the newspapers that everyone in Marion deserved the harsh treatment we were getting because we had either assaulted a staff member or an inmate in other federal institutions, that they eventually had to transfer those of us that were sent to Marion from Court or MCC. I was brought back to Marion on October 30, 1991 and am here at the time of this writing. It's still a nightmare.

VON MOOS, #79328 012
PO Box 1000
Marion IL 62959

I have been a prisoner here at the swamp (USP Marion) for 8 years now. I was sent here from USP Leavenworth, due to a rogue officer's prevaricated report which was written to cover his misconduct. And, as usual, the falsified report was verified by his friend ? "the infamous" govt. memo. Once here, I encountered a remarkable degree of malfeasance. It is virtually impossible to describe the baseness of this unbelievable moronic structure which comprises approx. 85% of the workforce (from warden's on down, i've seen it all) at Marion. If the nightmarish oppression of our senses were not so vicious, one could almost find relief in the trained seriousness of these thoroughly incompetent fools. For their daily routines are truly comical.

Unfortunately, it is that same stumblebum IQ which can be easily turned (told to turn) into a cruel tormentor of handcuffed and shackled men.

Men who are not allowed to touch their loved ones: whose letters are often "lost" -- [or worse, purposely given to other inmates with the idea of creating more friction amongst us] -- men being held here "permanently" because they will not surrender their dignity: will not conform to what they know in their hearts is wrong.

Men of substance, whose loyalty to their friends and associates nets punishment at Alcatraz II.

Men who have not had an incident report (or have suffered an erroneous one) and are removed from (or are never admitted to) the honor units -- again, and again . . . and again!

These unwarranted punishments, in one form or another, are most commonplace here. There are no meaningful programs for 15% of this population classified by the govt. courts or bureau of prisons as having unofficial death sentences.

The hopelessness of these "carefully applied" injustices, engender a most powerful psychologically destructive element.

Lawyers, congressmen and senators alike, are unable to penetrate the armor of this evil megatherion.

All part of "the mission" set forth by the BOP . . . whose dept. is finally starting to be correctly recognized as the executioner's arm of the injustice system!

Convicts noticed the high administrative conspiracies forthcoming at this unique institution long before I arrived. Yet so nefarious were the government's actions,

that no one was able to stop it. Even Amnesty International were pushed down and had sand kicked in their respectable faces.

Yes, the govt. has succeeded in crushing numerous people within this system. [But] while attempting to destroy those percentages whom they classify as radical dissident material, they have inadvertently created a fissionable stratum of highly focused, phenomenally capable, ultra-destructive individuals who understand "the mission" in its entirety: and look far into the future to actualize their goals.

I assure you, this country is entering a new era of "total" control. Waving their quasi-constitution, the agents of distortion seek to build a control unit in every city. Ah . . . that's by the people, <u>for</u> the people, of course!

No member of society should allow these warehouses to exist. I now hope that all of you look up from your VCR-TV hypnotic paralysis before you are clubbed in the head and draconian'd off! I will see you in seven (7) months when I fully expire this -- worst of the worst -- 15 year sentence for bank robbery.

The one who remembers all!

ALBERTO MARES
(no longer in prison, may be reached thru CEML)

In July of 1972 I and a number of other prisoners took part in a peaceful work strike to protest the brutal beating of a fellow prisoner by the name of Jesse Lopez. As a result of this work strike several of us were placed in an isolated unit later called the Control Unit which was also called the CARE PROGRAM (Control and Rehabilitation Effort). In reality it was an experimental behavior modification program at the US Prison at Marion, Illinois.

What do I remember about the CONTROL UNIT! EVERYTHING! The beatings; the gassings; the killing of Curly Fee by prison guards; the denial of basic human rights. Sensory Deprivation, or complete isolation, was used in an effort to break our spirits. TODAY, I still feel the effects of being in the CONTROL UNIT for 18 months at Marion. I sometimes wake up at night sweating because of dreams I have of being in the CONTROL UNIT. I hear the screams of brothers who are being beaten by the goon squads; I still hear the voices of some brothers begging for medication that will help them escape the realities, the indignities, the inhumanities of a CONTROL UNIT that only worked to accentuate frustration, rage and helplessness.

But despite the variety of indignities that we were subjected to, many of us survived, and went on to continue struggling against a system that oppresses people. I give thanks to my family and people such as Rafael Cancel Miranda, Raul "Tapon" Salinas, Michael Deutsch, Flint Taylor, and all the wonderful people of the Peoples Law Office in Chicago, who gave me courage and a desire to survive so that I could continue fighting in another time and place where the conditions would be more favorable.

The U.S. Government is always fast to criticize other governments for their inhumane treatment of U.S. so called political prisoners who in reality are spies who were caught. This criticism is harsh and backed up with military intervention yet it closes its eyes on the brutal treatment of its own prisoners here in the United States. Especially in places such as Marion, where all prisoners are now in a CONTROL UNIT. The setting of this unit not only demeans and dehumanizes but shapes behavior so that violent behavior is the result rather than the cause. WE MUST DO EVERYTHING IN OUR POWER TO STOP AND CLOSE DOWN THESE CONTROL UNITS. WE CANNOT allow sick government officials to destroy or kill brothers such as OSCAR LOPEZ RIVERA. It was the people who won the eventual release of Rafael Cancel Miranda, Lolita Lebron, Oscar Collazo, Irvin Flores, and our beloved comapnero Andres Cordero. And it must be the people who will win the eventual release of Oscar and other brothers and sisters who are real political prisoners imprisoned only because they dared to fight for the liberation of their people. WE MUST STRUGGLE TO FREE THEM. WE MUST NEVER, NEVER FORGET THESE WONDERFUL FREEDOM FIGHTERS. WE MUST LET THEM KNOW THAT WE CARE AND ARE STRUGGLING TO FREE THEM.

IN SOLIDARITY, I AM YOURS IN THE STRUGGLE TO ACHIEVE FREEDOM, LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL OPPRESSED PEOPLE.

RAMOND LUC LEVASSEUR, #10376-016
PO Box 1000
Marion IL 62959

I have been in Marion since December '89 (actually since August '86, but I was out on write for over 3 years for the sedition trial. ... Marion is the most written-about prison in the world. One of the battle lines drawn in October, 1983, was for public opinion. The government is winning this battle hands down. The Bureau of Prisons utilizes a highly effective public relations strategy which revolves around the agiprop slogan "the worst of the worse" to describe Marion prisoners. It is a soundbite which condenses "nigger, spic, white trash, jobless, homeless, useless underclass" into one dehumanizing phrase. Dehumanizing a population with language is a prelude to dehumanizing them with force.

THE BUREAU OF PRISON'S STATEMENT IS FALSE, unless "the worst" refers to rebels, dissenters, revolutionaries, jailhouse lawyers, group members and others whose beliefs and integrity the Bureau of Prisons wants to crush. It is false when one examines who is sent to Marion, and why they're here. Certainly there are exceptions, but those exceptions don't warrant the use of collective punishment. Additionally, I've not met a convicted felon whose misdeeds were in any way comparable to the massive killing of civilians perpetrated by the likes of Nixon, Reagan, Bush, et al. . . .

THE STATE OF ILLINOIS recently approved construction of another control unit prison. Before the ink was dry on the legislation, the economically depressed counties of southern Illinois were unabashedly begging for the prison to be located on their turf. One state legislator stated there was so much unemployment in his county, "it would be a crime" not to locate the prison there. A crime *not* to build a control unit prison in an area already saturated with them. "Worst of the worse" means nothing to these people. All they want are warm bodies to feed on. They don't much care where they come from. . . .

EVEN A RELATIVELY SMALL STATE like Maine has opened a control unit for 100 prisoners at an initial cost of $16 million. Already the state is seeking to double the size of the prison. Maine's situation somewhat reflects what's happening nationwide. The state spent money it could not afford to build a control unit prison it does not need. Concurrently, the state cut rehab programs at the Youth Reformatory and slashed programs to Aid to Families with Dependent Children ($418 a month for a parent with 2 children). By gouging the needs of children, the state insured a steady supply of youthful offenders to fill its control unit and other cells well into the next generation. New York and Florida have come up with their own creative fraud by diverting funds initially allocated for the homeless and social welfare programs, to fund prison construction and operations.

THE MISNAMED CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM churns out an appalling casualty rate. There are now almost one million children under the age of 18 who have one or both parents in prison. One in four black men is in prison or under police "supervision". More Latinos than ever before are locked up. More women and children. More of everyone whose lives are plagued by poverty and racism. The proliferation of control unit prisons represents one response of wealth and power to the agony of the oppressed.

IT'S NOT EASY TO CHART a future course from inside. Doing time in these joints is like walking a mine field. The Florence prison will present new challenges and other control units are cutting their teeth. We know from Attica, Lucasville, and a hundred other rebellions, both organized and spontaneous, that stiff resistance will continue. Some of it will be violent. We also know that as captive slaves we are extremely vulnerable to offensive violence and retribution by the guards. For this reason, some matters are best left to clandestine maneuvers.

What's clear to me now and has been since I first did time in '69-71 is that no matter how much litigation and legislation is filed and defiled, the road to building a prisoners' movement is paved with solidarity. Irrespective of individual differences and group affiliations, we all have a common bond on which to stand together. Solidarity is our greatest weapon, bar none. Additionally, outside support is critical. A necessary lifeline involves family, friends, professionals, and political activists. We urgently need a stronger voice. And everyone -- inside and out of prison walls -- can help build it.

ALAN BERKMAN
(no longer in prison, may be reached thru CEML)

I, like many political prisoners, spent time at Marion. The physical conditions themselves are horrendous. I was locked in a 7 x 7 windowless concrete cage 23 hours a day. The our a day I spent outside the cell was not in the fresh air (that was a total of two hours per week), but on the concrete range than runs the length of the cell block. The furnishings in the cell consist of a concrete slab with a plastic pallet to sleep on, two cardboard boxes for personal possessions and legal material, and a small black and white television. The TV is somehow supposed to make it all better.

Marion is a concrete and steel embodiment of power, and the essence of that power is that it is arbitrary and does not have to make sense. My time in Marion led me to believe that there is a qualitative difference between power and authority. Authority implies that there are rules and regulations that govern everyone's behavior, both those who govern and those who are governed. The inference is that there are some rights remaining to the people being controlled. Power recognizes no rights except its own.

Most prisons have rules; Marion has none. While the Bureau of Prisons proclaims that Marion is for the "worst of the worst", and is stocked with prison murderers and escapees, the reality is that the FBI can have anyone they choose sent there. I was a medium security prisoner with no record of prison violence or escape; my "crime" was being political. Marion has more political prisoners than any other prison for men in the federal system; in the last few years, a control unit prison for women ironically named Marianna has also been established. Predictably, four women political prisoners, including two who had been at the infamous Lexington High Security Unit, were sent there.

Just as designation to Marion is arbitrary, so is the decision about transfer out of Marion. Prison authorities say you can "earn" your way out; the reality is that those same authorities decided when they think you're "ready".

Arbitrary power carries as its premise that the individual who is the object of that power has no human rights. We have no rights because we are no truly human. It is the whim of those in power that determines the fate of those they rule. The goal of Marion, and all the prisons like it, is to strip its victims of their fundamental sense of self.

Dehumanization is not unique to Marion. All prisons dehumanize their inmates. Society dehumanizes those who are not white, male, monied, and heterosexual. Yet Marion has its particular role in this system of control and power; it is reserved for those who most fiercely resist being stripped of their dignity. A number of years ago I analogized the role of Marion in the prison system to the role that the Mississippi

plantations played in the slave system. There must always be an ultimate threat (and reality) to be used against those who rebel at the "merely" intolerable.

One visceral lesson I learned in Marion and every other prison I was in is that dehumanization evokes rage. I used to believe that rage was one of those unfortunate emotions that stemmed from our animal nature. Now I know that I was wrong: rage can be our most human emotion. Rage is what a human being feels when she or he is not treated like a human being. It can take very destructive forms: people can strike out at themselves, their families, their own community. But make no mistake: we rage when our most basic, most intimate, most human self has been violated.

When you imprison rage, you need someplace where you can try to extinguish it bey destroying the very humanity that it breeds on. That's why the United States now has 37 Marions and is building more each day. They are filling them with those prisoners who are most enraged or those who have the most political understanding of what's happening. It will not work. People will survive; the human spirit will survive. But the price is terrible both for those inside and those in the community.

Early in this century, Eugene Debs and the Socialists knew that their lot was tied to that of the people in prison. It's a lesson that white progressives and leftists have seemingly lost. It's long past time to learn it again.

WOODY RAYMER, #09346-074
PO Box 1000
Marion, Illinois 62959

I've been a prisoner at Marion since June of 1991. I was sent to Marion because the federal government considers me a nonconformist because I abhor prison life, and because I escaped from another institution by walking out the gate (front door). To me, the crime of incarceration is abhorrent, and prisons such as Marion, are true dungeons of despair. It requires man, with his imagination, aided by his master of matter, to construct such a house of misery, degradation, dehumanization, and suffering. Reflections . . .

They punish me, not because I'm a violent man, but because I'm a thinker and because they cannot break my spirits. While I'm a humble person and I have respect for people and for life, no one can control my mind because it belongs to me. No one has to believe as I do, but I do not have to accept the beliefs of others, for only in my mind and spirit can I remain free in such a world of deep loneliness and forgetfulness. Reflections. . .

In Marion, the prisoners are good and ordinary people, but the federal government and much of the media exploits their mistakes and frailties to the point that the prisoners often become the victims of a society which doesn't understand and doesn't care. The federal government wants this and they encourage it, as they bask in their unbridled fun and laughter, in an orgy lacking in the virtues of self-honesty and principles, as you, (the taxpayers), along with the human beings who are isolated and buried alive in steel and concrete tombs, pay the price for their exploits. Reflections. . .

Isolation and control-unit prisons, such as Marion, have a tendency to punish those prisoners who exhibit qualities that should be encouraged. They punish those with principles and intelligence, for the keepers know that knowledge is power and they feel threatened by it. They punish those who have dignity and self-respect, and they try to wash those virtues from the face of the prison scene. They punish those who respond to their environment based on internal criteria, and they shut off those channels of circulation. In Marion, they allow each person two fifteen-minute calls per month, and they monitor each word that's spoken. If a person were to have three or four grown children, then that person might only be able to talk to each one every three or four months. They read each letter, each word we write, and some of our letters make it out of the prison, while others make their way to a shredder. Reflections . . .

The prisoners here won't laugh at you and the unbelievable things you may think and say about them, though they may not trust you. They wait and see; words are cheap, and they've had a lot of words, a lot of broken promises; the counselors, the preachers, the wardens; they all come and go; more words, more broken promises, but I doubt you'd understand this. Reflections. . .

Some of the prisoners are so chewed up by the brutality of their lives that they hate the law, hate society, hate themselves and everyone else. However, under that crushing load, you will find wonderful, loving, intelligent, creative human beings, capable of healing, capable of devotion, capable of joy and love. You'll probably laugh because the government and the media have programmed you to feel differently about prisons. Reflections . . .

When prisoners begin to trust a few other human beings and they begin to believe in themselves, they feel very vulnerable, but with a little help and understanding, they can rid themselves of their fears. They'll think about connecting with people and about building a world together, but the process will be slow, because prisoners have no selected social interaction in places such as Marion. For now, that will not happen, and they are forsaken and forgotten, because you do not understand. Reflections . . .

My reflections of Marion cannot be adequately explained in words, for there is no true definition that you would understand. I can sum it up better, simply by using a couple of lines from one of the many poems I've written, in order to help myself to maintain some semblance of sanity during my stay at this miserable manmade pitfall. The following lines are from my poem, titled, "Somehow:"

"The rain pours into puddles beneath the blades of grass;
dropping and bounding from the high fences,
that surround our souls,
and keep our physical selves,
confined to this miserable place . . .

The sheets of rain, falling sideways in the lights;
being blown by angry winds,
that fear to cross such empty space,
and a spiritual light fills me,
as the gentle rain chants me to sleep . . .

Softly stir the sleeping hears of those within;
soon, they will arise anew to find,
that somewhere, thru the hidden mystery of the night,
fresh seeds of hope have been implanted,
Somehow . . . Reflections . . . .

GABRIEL TORRES
(no longer in prison, may be reached thru CEML)

Dear Mike Deutsch,

I've been wondering about where to start on the piece you asked me to write on my experience(s) in H-Unit at Marion. I decided to do it in the form of a letter to you. You were the first to visit from the outside, my first real friend from the area and you were instrumental in my early release from the infamous H-Unit. So, if it's alright with you I'll dedicate this to you.

My first thoughts are of La Count Bly, one of the heroes of the Leavenworth riot of 1972. He approached my cell on the first day with soap, a towel and an extra piece of underwear. He told me to hide the stuff and keep it because once the guards start messing with me they would deny me these things. He gave me some advice on how to survive in H-unit and returned to his cell. I was touched by this humane gesture of solidarity from someone who had suffered so much. I later learned that La Count Bly supposedly committed suicide while in lock up in Springfield, Missouri. It's 18 years later and I still have to fight back tears when I think of him.

There's also Gypsy whose cell was next to mine. One Saturday afternoon he spoke to me for the first time, saying that I would be "alright," that I had what it takes to make it. He'd been in prison 30 years, that night he hung himself.

The main goals of the prison administration are to fill you with hopelessness and despair, break your spirit and make the world seem small.

Practically cut off from the outside world, you're dependent on the guards for everything. Toilet tissue is issued once a week, underwear is distributed on a daily basis. The meals are brought to your cell with something missing; salt, a spoon or sugar. Anything to rile you and make you reactive.

You'll find that the guards develop a very sadistic attitude as a result of the total control they exercise. Mail which is precious to a prisoner is often held back or at times dropped on the floor and "accidentally" stepped on to get a reaction. A reaction that would warrant calling the riot squad and justification to beat you or otherwise leave your cell in disarray. At least this is how things were when I was there in 1975. I imagine that things are worse since now you have total lock down and therefore total control.

Unfortunately some prisoners begin to lash out at each other. Their frustrations, anxieties, despair, whatever, turns inward and builds until there's an explosion. Usually this explosion is directed at another prisoner. First it's verbal, then when given a chance -- at times the guards will "accidentally" open the cells of the antagonists. This tends to result in someone's death.

The administration parades "experts" -- psychologists, professional jailers who visit Marion, a model for the future. You're a guinea pig in a Federal Bureau of Prisons experiment where techniques applied during World War II and modern-day German prisons are perfected.

If a prisoner does not have strong politics, a firm conviction and a sense of knowing why he is there, chances are he will not survive the hate and bitterness that the system imbues.

I don't like talking about my experiences in Marion. People don't believe that such things happen in this country. The U.S., "champion" of human rights. It's a nightmare.

BILL DUNNE, # 10916-086/3J
PO Box 33
Terre Haute, Indiana 47808

DIME DOWN

The lockdown of the U.S. Penitentiary at Marion, Illinois, is now a decade old. The magnitude of decades in human experience is obvious in the marking of cultural epochs -- the sixties, the fifties, the eighties. It even emerges in popular music as the definition of a long time -- ". . . ten years has got behind you . . . " and ". . . ten years burnin' down the road . . . ". And if ten years is a long time in the real world, imagine what it is in a repressive sarcophagus such as the control unit prison Marion has become.

For seven years, I was a shadow in the dark concrete corners of dungeon Marion, from FEB/85 to MAR/92. I learned the prison was and is an experiment in social manipulation and control that was and is carried out with zero concern for the welfare of the experimental subjects or the communities into which all but a very few of them will eventually be released. I was shown there is not even a pretense that the regime is intended to be constructive for prisoners, though swine petulantly insist they are not guards but correctional professionals. I found that to the extent anyone accomplishes anything positive at Marion, it is despite rather than because of the conditions and can be only a shadow of what is possible. I saw that people survive Marion, but they carry from it psycho scars and other baggage they may never transcend.

This tenth year may be the last full year of lockdown at Marion, but the lockdown is to be passed on, reputedly in the spring. The federal government has built a 484 cell lockdown mausoleum at Florence, Colorado, to which it will transfer the "mission" of Marion -- for $122,000 per cell, exclusive of exorbitant operating costs. Already transferred has been the decade long habit of official lies about control units as evidenced by repetition of the same, old, tired, discredited disinformation about who is consigned to Marion that has appeared in Southern Illinois media in Colorado papers with respect to Florence. The new dungeon promises to be even more repressive than Marion with virtually total isolation and for longer periods than at Marion. Public wealth was squandered on this instrument of oppression even though no evidence says Marion has fulfilled its alleged purpose and much says it has been counterproductive. And the deeper and darker the concrete corner, the looser the rein on official brutality, both active and passive.

Ten years ago, Marion was the only control unit prison in the country. Since then, at least 36 states have joined the trend to increasing repression, and the federal government has reaffirmed its commitment to perpetual lockdown with the construction of Florence ADX (Administrative Detention Lockdown Facility). Ten years of official dishonesty -- and the failure of lockdown repression to correct -- show that lockdown dungeons like Marion are a threat to everyone, regardless of how remote prison may seem to anyone's place in the struggle. Humanity should commit us to struggle against it for as much of the next ten years as is required.

YU KIKUMURA, #09008-050
PO Box 1000
Marion, IL 62959

My dear Comrades, Friends, Sisters and Brothers,

I have been incarcerated at USP Marion since March 9, 1989, after a one year trial. . . . I do not intend here to speak only of what has happened to me at Marion as a political prisoner, because I believe that all Marion prisoners are political prisoners inasmuch as Marion was designed to propagate the prison system throughout the U.S. which would be ruled and managed by forces -- violent power, the guard dogs of the ruling class. Stigmatized as a "bad apple" in the prison system, they are selected for the political purposes of the ruler -- the U.S. imperialist. The "bad apple"is is not a few hundred prisoners but the entire prison system, the entire political, economical and social system in the U.S. which is the very source of the new world disorder. . . .

At the bottom and front line to dominate the people (the have-nots) by the forces in such a society as the people are deprived of their autonomy (that is, to govern by themselves in self-reliance, caring and trusting each together based upon human faith, dignity, esteem and righteousness on commitment in their real life world). The prison system is the terminal place to maintain the security of the public for the haves and is a safety valve for them, among other things, in order to secure the state's forces either as a primary vehicle to purge the people who are against the ruler -- U.S. imperialist -- from the society and as the most powerful tool to deprive the people of their ability to achieve autonomy.

Therefore, the prison is not working for the rehabilitation of prisoners, but exists for the sole purpose of maintaining security and order in itself, relying upon the forces.

The handful of so-called elite people, the rulers over the have-nots, are seeking a new era in the prison system in the U.S. which would be armed with new computer and science technology, and which would be in accordance with the new police state in the street which is controlled by more sophisticated, advanced computerized forces. Because they need to prepare for the New World Order of disorder. That is the "new Marion" in Colorado -- the prison which is designed as a leading laboratory for the new prison era prison system in order for insuring the security in the entire world for the haves, producing a new kind of law and rule to dominate not only prisoner but the whole people of the have-nots by the forces, the state's terror.

So to the new state's terror, our answer is just say NO! through our action and commitment in the struggle.

in the struggle, get along with you

OSCAR LOPEZ-RIVERA, #87651-024
PO Box 1000
Marion, IL 62959

The administrators of USP-Marion and the bureaucrats of the BOP are constantly stating to the public that this prison exists in order to control the most vicious, ferocious, dangerous and predatory criminals. The local electronic and print media echo the mendacious utterances of these officials without the minutest consideration for the truth. Consequently, after several years of repeating the mendacities of the jailers, falsehood has become the truth. But what the public has not been told is that in this concentration camp there are "Marielito" prisoners (Cubans whose only crime against this society was to enter this country during the Mariel boat lift) whose sentences have expired and are being held here because the BOP and the INS don't want them in an environment where they can organize other Cuban prisoners. People have not been told that there are prisoners with the AIDS virus who are being kept in isolation without proper medical attention and running the risk to infect other prisoners. They are not told that a large percentage of prisoners in Marion have been kept here for years because they have consciously refused to be passive guinea pigs in the nefarious experiment of the lockdown. They are not told that the BOP and the jailers in Marion have no written policies to inform the prisoner what he had to do in order to be transferred out of this concentration camp. Therefore, the length of time that a prisoner has to spend here is arbitrarily and whimsically determined. People are not told that the deleterious conditions prevailing in USP-Marion are not only detrimental to the physical and mental health of the prisoners but also to the guards and the public. The public is not told that the majority of the prisoners will be released in the future, and because they have not been provided with adequate rehabilitation and instead have been kept under such infra-human conditions, when they'll be ex-carcerated they are going to be in worse conditions than when they were incarcerated. People are not told that the water that prisoners drink is highly contaminated. People are not told that the lock down is not a deterrent of violence. In other words, while the truth has been obviated from the public, the jailers, the BOP bureaucrats and the media have fed the people heavy dosages of lies.

For people concerned with human rights and the truth, the Marion lockdown should be more than a small challenge and a trivial issue. Today, the Marion model is proliferating throughout the country and is being sold as a panacea to resolve all the problems that the prison system has created by sheer neglect, insensitivity, prejudice and plain racism. One such model was the control unit in Lexington that was built to house political prisoners. While more and more control units are being built with the clear objective of incarcerating political prisoners, more political prisoners are receiving longer sentences. This is happening at a time that progressive and radical dissent in this country has become less tolerated and the far right, especially the most violent elements, has become more entrenched, popular and accepted.

As prisoners living in this hell and utter state of helplessness, there's very little that we can do. Even the support of our immediate family is not available since the majority of us come from far away places like Guam, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and Latin America. So we depend on the support that those concerned with human rights and the lockdown give us. As a Puerto Rican POW I exhort all freedom loving people to support us.

End the Marion lockdown!
Free all political prisoners and POWs!
Respect the human rights of regular prisoners and all political prisoners!

Leslie

Leslie knows about time
it's all she has besides
the nightmares of the past
that leave her weeping.
The man in the tower
watches with deliberate intent,
as she walks by head down
with a crooked smile.
Leslie daydreams of a freedom,
a life that could have been,
a male lover, unborn children,
books of poetry that should be published.
Leslie lives at the end of hall B
Her next door neighbors are junkies,
she's had so many she doesn't notice,
it's all the same.
Leslie is a tall woman,
at one time she must have been
lovely,
erotic, even in exile.

Written by
Jacobs-Madison Davenport
1989