

CIA—is shown, including coups in Iran, Guatemala, Chile, the Indochina wars, Central America's wars and Iran-Contra. As a jet flies into the Twin Towers the title proclaims: "Sept. 11, 2001: Osama bin Laden uses his expert CIA training to murder 3,000 people."

Nobel Peace Laureate Obama may weep for Sandy Hook's butchered children, but his drones killed 10 times more children than Adam Lanza did. Were he alive Lanza might quote Charlie Chaplin playing the serial wife murderer in 1947's "Monsieur Verdoux" who compares himself to politicians: "As a mass killer, I am an amateur by comparison."

The Military-Industrial-Intelligence-Entertainment Complex uses armed aggression to attain foreign policy objectives, then heralds perpetrators of these covert actions in disguised "amusements" for mass audiences in an endless cycle of murder and mayhem, perpetuating a cult of violence from Waziristan to Newtown, on- and offscreen. **CP**

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Houses of the Dead

Human Rights Crimes Inside America's Control Unit Prisons

BY NANCY KURSHAN

In 1985 some colleagues and I in Chicago registered, with shock, the brutality of the US Penitentiary at Marion in southern Illinois and organized a program to alert the public (really, the movement) about what was going on. We would do just this, we told ourselves, and then get back to all the other movement work in which we were involved. Just this.

But the work, of course, would not be left alone. The inhumanity, brutality and torture by the United States demanded a humane response and we tried to provide that. Fifteen years later we were still fighting against prison brutality in general and control units or isolation units in particular. Over those 15 years we sponsored perhaps a 100 demonstrations throughout the country, 200 major educational events, published a huge amount of literature, put forward theoretical insights into prisons and control units in particular and foreshadowed more recent formulations like those of Michelle Alexander in her very wonderful book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*.

In the course of those years, we made several predictions along the way and issued associated cautions. One way to evaluate the power of an analysis is by its ability to predict. Our two primary predictions were: 1) that imprisonment would reach 1 million by 2000, fueled particularly by a rise in incarceration of people of color; 2) that control unit prisons would proliferate and serve as an anchor dragging the whole system in a more repressive direction. (In contrast the Bureau

of Prisons, the BOP, insisted that control units would allow the overall system to run more openly.) We were unfortunately correct on all scores. Our prisons are a human rights disaster. In 1971, no prisoner lived under control unit conditions. Today, there are control units in virtually every state in the union, and whether they are called Control Units, Supermax, SHU (Secure Housing Unit), Administrative Maximum Facility ADX), Communication Management Unit (CMU), a skunk by any other name still stinks. On any given day, over 80,000 prisoners live under these torturous conditions.

History

Previous to 1963, the worst prison in the U.S. was Alcatraz, the island prison located in the middle of San Francisco Bay. It was the place where the U.S. government sent the people it hated the most. Morton Sobell was incarcerated there, co-defendant of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg who were executed during the McCarthy era. Also interned there was Puerto Rican independence leader and political prisoner, Rafael Cancel Miranda. And of course many others, not all political prisoners.

In 1963 the BOP closed the federal penitentiary at Alcatraz as it had become too expensive to run and was outdated in every possible way. The replacement was USP Marion, located in southern Illinois. Marion then became, as Alcatraz had been, the end of the line of the federal prison system, the place where the US government would send those prisoners it hated the most—not at all the most violent prisoners but those the government wanted hidden from view. One of the corollaries of this was that many of the most resistant and politicized prisoners were sent to Marion. Both Alcatraz and now the new prison at Marion, Illinois, ran relatively freely. That is, prisoners lived and worked with other prisoners. They ate in a communal dining hall. They had group recreation and religious services. On occasion, a prisoner would be put in solitary (thrown in the hole) in response to a perceived infraction. Today we are used to images of prisoners in solitary confinement, but back then it was not the rule.

In 1972, after guards severely beat a Mexican prisoner, the prisoners went on a work stoppage, refusing to participate in their work assignments. In response the feds locked down one wing of the prison, throwing all the prisoners in that unit into indefinite solitary confinement, in what was essentially the first "control unit." One of the people locked down was Rafael Cancer Miranda, the well-known Puerto Rican nationalist, who was accused of being a leader of the strike.

In October of 1983, two prisoners at Marion (in fact, members of the Aryan Brotherhood) killed a guard, ironically in the control unit wing of the prison. There was no response in the rest of the prison, no rebellion, no peaceful work stoppage. Nonetheless, the BOP seized on the opportunity to lock down the entire prison, all 350 men. This was the

first such control unit prison. The BOP claimed that this was a temporary measure but as the lockdown continued, some of us who had been monitoring the situation were not optimistic that this was a short term development. As 1983 continued into 1984 and then 1985 we grew more and more alarmed. We understood that this was a significant and new historical development, that we were seeing a restructuring of prison life as we knew it. We realized that the government was experimenting, not just on the prisoners, but on us as well. If these horrific conditions could win public acceptability, then control units would proliferate everywhere. In 1985 we issued a call for a conference in Chicago in October to commemorate two years of the lockdown and to better understand what the future held in store.

Why Do We Care About Prisons?

I have been asked by many people why would I choose to do work regarding prisons? My answer is simple. In high school and college I was part of the civil rights movement. I picketed Woolworths with CORE, raised money for SNCC workers in the South, heard Dr. King speak in D.C. and Malcolm X in Madison. I see work to abolish control units as a logical continuation of that anti-racist work.

Albert Hunt's article in the *NY Times* on Nov. 20, 2011 entitled "A Country of Inmates" reported that "With just a little more than 4 percent of the world's population, the U.S. accounts for a quarter of the planet's prisoners and has more inmates than the leading 35 European countries combined." Moreover, this mass imprisonment binge does not affect all sectors of the population equally. No, the prisons are overflowing disproportionately with Black and Latino prisoners. As Hunt wrote, "more than 60 percent of the United States' prisoners are black or Hispanic, though these groups comprise less than 30 percent of the population." One in nine black children has a parent in jail! If it weren't for the over-incarceration of people of color, the U.S. imprisonment rates would look similar to those of many a European country.

Although we concentrated on control units, we did so because we saw them as the capstone of a thoroughly racist prison system. Both mass incarceration and control units are

united in terms of their underlying ideology. Both come out of a profoundly racist ideology that blames the victim and refuses to deal with the structural challenges and fault lines of our society. And of course, refuses to change the pitiful conditions inside our prisons.

We have never really dealt with the legacy of slavery. We have not dealt with the immigration challenge. We have not dealt with the lack of jobs at a living wage. We have not made room at the table. We have not dealt with how to "rehabilitate" people, especially since, as Malcolm said, they have never "been habilitated." Rather we have met the challenge of a huge under-reported unemployment problem with an imprisonment binge. And the challenge of an anti-human prison system with control unit prisons.

Our prisons have no real plans for 'rehabilitation.' That would require a restructuring of society, a real jobs and education program—one that we need now more than ever but that is not on the horizon. In fact, the jobs program that we do have has been building more prisons and hiring more guards. The prisons are located long distances from the urban centers that most prisoners call home and offer jobs to a



Secure housing unit. Pelican Bay State Prison.

totally different sector of the population. The imprisonment binge has served to get largely young men of color off the streets, warehousing them to prevent any disruption that might come from millions of unemployed men of color out on the pavement.

Social Control of People of Color

Beyond racism, the more we studied together, the more we learned about imprisonment. The well-known criminologist William Nagel found that there is no relationship between the crime rate and the imprisonment rate, and no relationship between the crime rate and the number of Black people that live in a given state. But he found a strong relationship between the imprisonment rate and the proportion of Black people who live in a given state. In other words, people go to prison because they are Black not because of a rising crime rate. It became apparent to us that prisons are instruments of social control of people of color. Before the 1970s we did

not have these huge imprisonment rates, nor did we have control unit prisons. In the 1960s Black people led the way in challenging injustice. They were a force to be reckoned with. When Martin Luther King and Malcolm X were assassinated, there was mass unrest with urban centers going up in flames around the country.

The Attica prison rebellion of 1971 was a watershed where prisoners stood up and said: “We are men. We are not beasts and will not be treated as such.” To a large extent, the rebellion was an expression within Attica of the Black liberation movement on the outside. When the tear gas and bullets cleared, 43 men were dead as a result of Rockefeller-ordered military assault. Control units try to prevent the kind of camaraderie and resistance from developing that was exhibited on the yard at Attica.

For almost 50 years prior to Attica, the U.S. incarceration rates were constant, and commensurate with those of Western Europe. In response to the movements of the 60s and early 70s, particularly civil rights and black liberation, in response to Attica and George Jackson and the California prison movement, imprisonment rates started to soar, and we saw the beginnings of what would become a mass imprisonment binge. It was no accident that control units began to emerge at the same time. Just as prisons control a population on the outside of prisons that was demanding human rights, control units control a rebellious prison population on the inside. The first control unit was opened at Marion in 1972, exactly in response to a peaceful work stoppage and a year after the incredible uprising at Attica.

In 1975 the right-wing ideologue and Harvard Professor Samuel Huntington wrote *The Crisis of Democracy*, a report for the Trilateral Commission, in which he argued that there was too much democracy and things needed to change. Well, things have changed. And now, thanks to both Republicans and Democrats, the leading ‘democracy’ in the world is also the largest incarceration nation.

The Real Human Rights Problem is Here in the USA

So what is a control unit prison?

There are variations from prison to prison, but generally speaking, a control unit prison is one in which every prisoner is locked away in their own individual cage about 23 hours a day under conditions of severe sensory deprivation. The prisoner eats, sleeps and defecates in the windowless cell. Meals come through a slot in the door. In some cases the prisoner may be out of the cell a couple of times a week for exercise, but in other circumstances the exercise area is even more limited and is attached to the cell itself. Most control unit prisons have little access to education or any recreational outlets.

Usually, control units severely restrict the prisoner’s connection not just with other prisoners, but with family and

friends in the outside world. At Marion, only family members could visit, upon approval, and only for a small number of visits per month. The amount of time allowed per visit was severely restricted, and there was no privacy whatsoever and no contact permitted between prisoner and visitor. Visiting took place over a plexiglass wall and through telephones. Guards were always within earshot. The prisoner had to be searched before and after, sometimes cavity searched. The visitor had to undergo a body search as well. The prisoners were brought to the visit in shackles.

Regarding the underlying dynamics, the intent is to make the prisoner feel that his or her life is completely out of control. That is not an unintended consequence. The purpose of the control unit is to make the person feel helpless, powerless and completely dependent upon the prison authorities. The intent is to strip the individual of any agency, any ability to direct his or her own life. A control unit institutionalizes solitary confinement as a way of exerting full control over as much of the prisoner’s life as possible.

There is no pretense that this is a temporary affair. Instead it is long-term, severe behavior modification, and it is the most vile, mind & spirit-deforming use of solitary confinement. Control units represent the darkest side of behavior modification. Inside a control unit, the prisoner usually has no idea how long he or she will be there. It is an indeterminate sentence, and usually the rules or guidelines for exiting are unclear at best and impossible to comprehend at worst. It is a hell without any apparent end. It is truly Kafkaesque and studies have shown that long-term solitary confinement drives many people crazy. As a social worker in the Chicago public schools for 20 years, and as a human being, I don’t believe this severe punishment helps people to change in any positive way. Human interaction is critical. The Quakers first instituted solitary confinement (they called isolation in a cell with a bible “doing penance,” hence “penitentiary”). They thought it would be a more humane alternative than physical punishment such as flogging, but they gave it up when they saw what effect it had on people.

Being sent to a control unit prison is tantamount to torture, as acknowledged by many human rights organizations including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Amnesty International recently released its 2012 report, “The Edge of Endurance: Conditions in California’s Security Housing Units,” in which the conditions in two California prisons—Corcoran and Pelican Bay—are described as “cruel, degrading and inhuman” and a violation of international standards. Readers can check it out at the Amnesty International site.

Prisoners are held under conditions that today are not considered ‘humane’ even for animals. This is an extreme abuse of state power.

The existence of the control unit also functions to control other prisoners who are in the general population. This is as

important to the system as the impact on those actually in the control unit. The fear of imprisonment in this worst of all prisons is meant to scare all prisoners into tolerating intolerable conditions. The word 'Marion' was meant to strike cold fear into the hearts of prisoners throughout the federal prison system.

The people who are sent to control unit prisons are not different from those people in the general population of a maximum security prison in terms of the crimes for which they are incarcerated. Most have not been convicted of violent crimes. Many are political prisoners, jailhouse lawyers, and natural leaders.

Domestic and International Connection

In my book *Out of Control* I argue that CEML's 15 years of work is "the story of one long determined effort against the very core of the greatest military empire that has ever existed on this planet" . . . and that "in this day of debate about Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib, it is absolutely essential to realize that a direct line extends from U.S. control units to these so-called 'enhanced interrogation' centers throughout the world." The connection has always been there because we live under one system, and that system has a domestic side and an international side. But they are really just two sides of the same coin.

In *Out of Control* I discuss a 1962 Bureau of Prisons (BOP) meeting in Washington, DC between prison officials and social scientists. Billed as a management development program for prison wardens, it took place the same year the BOP opened Marion. Dr. Edgar Schein of MIT, a key player at that meeting, had written previously in a book entitled *Coercive Persuasion* about 'brainwashing' of Chinese Prisoners of War (POWs). In the meeting he presented the ideas in a paper entitled "Man Against Man":

"In order to produce marked changes of attitude and/or behavior, it is necessary to weaken, undermine, or remove the supports of the old attitudes. Because most of these supports are the face-to-face confirmation of present behavior and attitudes, which are provided by those with whom close emotional ties exist, it is often necessary to break these emotional ties. This can be done either by removing the individual physically and preventing any communication with those whom he cares about, or by proving to him that those whom he respects are not worthy of it, and, indeed, should be actively mistrusted. . . I would like to have you think of brainwashing, not in terms of politics, ethics, and morals, but in terms of the deliberate changing of human behavior and attitudes by a group of men who have relatively complete control over the environment in which the captive populace lives." (Berrigan, p.6)

Along with these theories, Schein put forward a set of

'practical recommendations,' that threw ethics and morals out the window. They included physical removal of prisoners to areas sufficiently isolated to effectively break or seriously weaken close emotional ties; segregation of all natural leaders; spying on prisoners, reporting back private material; exploitation of opportunists and informers; convincing prisoners they can trust no one; systematic withholding of mail; building a group conviction among prisoners that they have been abandoned by or are totally isolated from their social order; using techniques of character invalidation, i.e. humiliation, revilement and shouting to induce feelings of fear, guilt and suggestibility; coupled with sleeplessness, an exacting prison regimen and periodic interrogational interviews.

So-called 'brainwashing' strategies that involved physical as well as psychological abuse were being adopted from international arenas and applied inside U.S. prisons. Now, in 2011, similar strategies, honed in Marion and its progeny, are being employed around the world in Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, and elsewhere.

Lessons

The underlying ideology has to be challenged because if that doesn't change, the rulers will tweak this or that to their conveniences, they may make some small changes, or even do the right thing at any given moment, for the wrong reason. But things will revert toward repression.

Understand that the whole criminal justice system, indeed the whole society, needs to be transformed. Fight to change the day-to-day conditions of prisoners but while educating people about the whole situation. Celebrate the small changes but never let them be enough.

Studies don't necessarily change things. Pressure, both legal and activist, is essential. Hearings can be a step in the right direction but they can also be a smokescreen to lull people into believing something is being done. Or they can be a rubber stamp for some negative developments. For instance, the BOP has apparently just recently agreed to undergo a "comprehensive and independent assessment of its use of solitary confinement in the nation's federal prisons." The assessment will reportedly be oriented toward reducing the population of "segregated" prisoners. It is to be conducted by the National Institute of Corrections, an agency of the BOP! That is something to be watched, but skeptically.

Listen to prisoners. Trust what they tell you about prison conditions. Support their efforts to change their situation. Help their voices reach the outside world.

Work with everyone who is willing. We don't have to all agree but we have to respect each other. Do not let the authorities demonize some activists and bestow accolades on others. That is the old divide and rule.

Opportunity

The time is right to build a powerful force to oppose these

institutions of torture. The people who fought the fascists in the Spanish Civil War are sometimes referred to as “premature anti-fascists.” Perhaps the members of the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown were “premature anti-solitary” activists. But now is the time, now is the moment. Most importantly, prisoners are resisting. 12,000 California prisoners, in the summer of 2011, went on hunger strike in opposition to the conditions in control unit prisons. There is awakening consciousness that these institutions are tantamount to torture. Not a single editorial ever appeared in a significant mass media outlet opposing control units during our 15 years. Now the *New York Times* has opposed them. Additionally, the money to run these expensive institutions is running out. Illinois’ control unit prison, Tamms, that we fought to prevent from opening, has recently been closed by Governor Quinn. Senator Durbin has called for an investigation into solitary confinement. There are openings. But we cannot rely on politicians to do the right thing. We can work with politicians who are true allies, but we have to be out in the community talking to people, and out in the streets and in front of the prisons, formulating our demands and building a powerful movement.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, in the *House of the Dead*, said “That to understand a civilization, it is necessary to look within its prisons.” Mohandas Gandhi once asked “What do you think of Western civilization? His answer was, “I think it would be a good idea.” So come on people. Let’s get on with it. **CP**

NANCY KURSHAN is the author of *Out of Control: A Fifteen Year Battle to Abolish Control Unit Prisons*. The book is available through the Freedom Archives.

Brotherhood of Summer

Major League Baseball’s Extraordinary Labor History

BY DAVID MACARAY

To fully appreciate baseball’s labor history, we need to put the game in its proper perspective. Which is to say we need to acknowledge that there was a time when baseball was everything. It was not only America’s *favorite* sport, it was its *only* sport. Yes, we had some boxing and rowing and college football, but compared to baseball, they were trivial endeavors. Whoever dubbed baseball the “national pastime” wasn’t being facetious; they were stating a hallowed fact.

The very first “professional” team (where every player was paid a salary) was the Cincinnati Red Stockings, established in 1869. The star of that Red Stockings club was a shortstop named George Wright, who was paid \$1,400 a season. And because Cincinnati was home to baseball’s first professional team, a tradition was established where the modern day Cincinnati Reds were permitted to open every season at home.

Despite the NFL being established way back in 1920, and the NBA in 1946, it took professional football and hoops decades to shed the image of “minor sports.” Pro football didn’t gain national prominence until the 1960s, with the proliferation of television, and basketball not until the 1970s (some would even argue that the NBA didn’t “arrive” until the Magic Johnson-Larry Bird era).

Yet this country had a professional baseball team in 1869—almost half a century before the arrival of Babe Ruth. Remarkably, we were already attending professional baseball games *four years* after the end of the Civil War. Baseball was everything.

Accordingly, because the game was so popular (and lucrative), the players and owners were butting heads almost from Day One. The players demanded higher pay, more autonomy, less hassles, and fewer restrictions (e.g., well into the 20th century they were still required to buy their own uniforms), while the owners insisted that playing baseball was a “privilege,” not a job—even though most teams were rolling in pre-federal income tax revenue.

Still, butting heads or not, it’s surprising to learn that baseball’s labor history is older and richer than many of America’s most storied industrial and service unions. It’s true. The first baseball union was the Brotherhood of Professional Base Ball Players (note that “baseball” was still two words), established way back in 1885, a mere nine years after the National League was formed, and sixteen years before the American League came into being.

Compare baseball’s labor pedigree with some of America’s big-time unions. For example, the United Mineworkers (UMW) was formed in 1890; the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) in 1900; the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) in 1903; the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) in 1921; the United Auto Workers (UAW) in 1935; and the United Steelworkers (USW) not until 1942.

The Brotherhood of Professional Base Ball Players (known as the “Brotherhood”) was co-founded by future Hall of Fame players Ned Hanlon (who was then playing for the National League Detroit Wolverines) and John Ward (then playing for the New York Gothams—renamed the “Giants” in 1885). In addition to being a star ballplayer, John Ward was also an accomplished lawyer, just the man to lead the charge in forming professional sports’ first labor union.

Ironically, it was baseball’s burgeoning popularity that motivated Ward and Hanlon to establish the Brotherhood. As profitable as the game had become, even its star players had little leverage when it came to salary negotiations. And these were the stars; imagine what it was like for the supporting cast. Not only were players woefully under-compensated and under-appreciated they were governed by arrogant and tyrannical club owners. Forming a labor union seemed like the obvious next move.