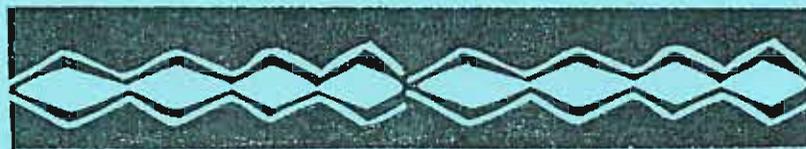


# Political Prisoners

Write

Critical Resistance



- Mumia Abu-Jamal — The Industry of Fear  
Silvia Baraldini — Message to Critical Resistance, and The Letter  
Herman Bell — In Support of Critical Resistance Conference  
Marilyn Buck, Susan Crane, Linda Evans, Dylcia Pagán, Alicia Rodríguez,  
Lucy Rodríguez, Carmen Valentín, and Laura Whitehorn —  
Message to Critical Resistance  
Marilyn Buck — Bones  
Susan Crane - Letter from FCI Dublin  
Jalil Abdul Muntaqim — from The Cold War of the 90's  
Lucy Rodríguez — Message to Critical Resistance  
Alicia Rodríguez — Message to Critical Resistance  
Russell "Maroon" Shoats — Open Letter to Supporters of  
"Recognized" Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War  
Albert Nuh Washington — Message to Critical Resistance  
Laura Whitehorn — For Standing Deer Wilson and All Righteous Old  
Men and Women in Prison and Notes from the Unrepententiary  
Block Prints by Marilyn Buck, Susan Crane, and Laura Whitehorn



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# The Industry of Fear

Mumia Abu-Jamal

As California goes, it is said, so goes the nation.

The nation, therefore, must be leaping headlong into an explosion of prison construction, into the development of control units, and into the expansion of what has rightly been termed the **Prison Industrial Complex**.

There can be no real, substantive discussion of the problem unless we take stock of the underlying factor, the fuel that feeds this construction: fear.

Americans live in a cavern of fear, a psychic, numbing force manufactured by the so-called entertainment industry, reified by the psychological industry, and buttressed by the coercion industry (i.e., the courts, police, prisons, and the like). The social psychology of America is being fed by a media that threatens all with an army of psychopathic, deviant, sadistic madmen bent on ravishing a helpless, prone citizenry. The state's coercive apparatus of 'public safety' is erected as a needed protective counter-point.

We then cry for more, under the assumption that more means better, and thus rural counties establish a vampirish relationship with repression, as they become America's newest plantations – a ghoulish, American-style 'gulag archipelago.' For them, for this new growth industry, there is no denial that crime does indeed pay.

We live, all of us, (whether inside or outside of the joint) in an age of unrivaled and unprecedented police power; where an arm of the state dictates public policy and directs public discourse along the lines of the expansion of its influence. They, through their so-called (anti-labor) unions, pay judges, pay politicians, and channel a repressive media into their de facto broadsheets.

The aura that pervades consciousness is one of inchoate fear, making us question each other, search each other, and call the cops on each other. Yet, implicit within the fear is the thrill; the thrill of difference, of danger, and of deviance. The illicit thrill manufactured in a culture of dualism, where the agents of the system are projected as angelic, and those deemed outside of the system are perceived as demonic.

If one may be properly projected as demonic then the state may freely utilize extraordinary methods to deal with one, for such a one is seen as beyond the pale of humanity.

For well over 160 years, the state, through her courts and legislatures, relegated non-white aliens to a category of intrinsic and unalterable inferiority, and by so doing, raised race (more aptly, whiteness) to an indicia of one's intelligence, culture and character.

This negative relegation allowed the wholesale rejection of millions of folk, Chinese, Japanese, Syrian, Indian, Ethiopian, all of the many and various categories of mankind, on the judgment that they were 'non-white' and thus, 'unfit' for citizenship. It is now seen as politically unpopular to make such judgments openly, so a code is utilized nowadays.

Witness the visceral distaste that comes to mind when the word 'criminal' is mentioned. That distaste is transformed into public policy when wedded to the cyclical (and, one might add, cynical) fear industry. French sociologist Denis Duclos observes: "Peddlers of real or fictional terrorized terror become rich and maintain the climate of insecurity, reaping maximum profit for all institutions that live off fear; the police, the justice system, industry, and the weapons and security trade." <sup>1</sup>

Simply put, any strategy that sees itself as challenging the **Prison Industrial Complex** must meet the perverse and powerful fear industry, a convergence of economic, political, and psychosocial interests, and conquer it. Needless to say, that will be a formidable task.

One meets a great offensive by skillfully mounting a greater counter-offensive, one that challenges, undermines, and dismantles that of the enemy.

Powerful interests support the fear industry, and therefore, powerful social forces, from the grassroots up, need to be energized, activated and mobilized to undo the considerable psychosocial damage done to the community mind through this continuous re-injection of culturally corrosive poison.

In short, **we must organize.**

Writing a book will not do it.

Writing a paper will not do it.

To transform reality, you must first transform consciousness, and to transform consciousness, you must first present people with a vision that challenges the fiendish projections of the industry. People are hungry for that which is life-affirming. We must reach out, and unite with them.

Acclaimed African-American poet, Paul Lawrence Dunbar wrote, "your cry is, 'we must agitate, we must agitate.' So you must bear in mind that the agitation of deeds is tenfold more effectual than the agitation of words." <sup>2</sup>

Critical resistance therefore means militant, uncompromising resistance to the insidious industry of fear. It is a challenge to the merchandising of misery, so deeply inculcated in American history.

This we must do.

Let us organize around that which is uplifting, and essentially what is human about us. We can then relegate the fear industry to the dusty museum basement of history.

Ona Move!  
Down with this New Age Slavery!

<sup>1</sup> Denis Duclos. *The Werewolf Complex: America's Fascination with Violence* (New York: Berg, 1998), p. 142

<sup>2</sup> From *The Tattler: A Paper for Colored People in Ohio* (1890), cited in Peter Linebaugh, *Aesop and Abolition* (Toledo, Ohio: University of Toledo, 1997).

Written for Critical Resistance, July 1998 © Mumia Abu-Jamal

Mumia Abu-Jamal is a political prisoner, a journalist and supporter of MOVE, on death row in Pennsylvania. His death warrant could be signed at any time. He is profiled in *Can't Jail the Spirit* (1998), and on the world wide web at <http://www.xs4all.nl/~tank/spg-1/mumia002.htm>. His most recent book is *Death Blossoms*. His address is Mumia Abu-Jamal # AM-8335, 1040 E. Roy Furman Hwy, Waynesburg PA 15370.

# Message to Critical Resistance

**Silvia Baraldini**

My name is Silvia Baraldini and this is the end of my 16th year in an American prison. I was convicted of having participated in the 1979 escape of Assata Shakur, and of having "conspired" to aid and assist New Afrikan revolutionaries in their quest for justice and self-determination. Since 1988 I have fought to be transferred to a prison in my homeland, Italy. Because of a growing movement of support there, the Italian government has also requested my repatriation. Despite all the efforts, the United States government has refused to do so five times. This past June, the subcommittee on penal affairs of the European Parliament voted 40-0 to back the Italian government's position in support of my repatriation.

In the last four years I have become a teacher. Nothing is more gratifying and fulfilling than discussing how to change our reality with my fellow prisoners. Following the example of Malcolm X, we use the study of history to transform individual concerns into a collective awareness of why we are here. Many women are very aware that their labor is being extracted and exploited. They recognize that they are cogs in huge profit-producing mechanisms. They experience it when their pay is posted in the commissary and it barely covers personal necessities; they feel it when they are charged \$5.25 for a small box of detergent; they resent it in the visiting room where their families pay 75 cents for a can of soda or a dollar for a bag of potato chips; they suffer because of it when they are told at pill line that they will not be given Tylenol because it is now sold in commissary.

It is exciting to many of the women here that people on the outside are beginning to tackle this issue. Developing an analysis and a strategy to change this situation is essential, but it will work only if prisoners are empowered to participate as equals in this struggle. Having said this, I extend my solidarity and thank everyone who worked long and hard to make this conference a reality.

# In Support of Critical Resistance Conference

Herman Bell

Greetings and solidarity to one and all. Just a few thoughts to reassure everyone that I am still alive and kicking. It seems to me that marches and demos ought to be tempered by concrete action and we don't see much of this happening today.

At the drop of a hat some group, individual, or organization will call a march or demo, and the regulars will show up at the appointed time. This kind of activity is almost laughable if it were not so sad because it's almost like going to a party. And when it's over people go home feeling good about themselves, feeling like work has been done (when in essence all they did was *talk* about doing it), and they wait for the next demo to be called, or they call one themselves.

Say what you will, but in the 60s Civil Rights marchers were more action minded. Often the march itself was a demo, because marching was forbidden by the authorities. Their march was a rallying cry from which people took heart and they sat-in, prayed-in, boycotted, and in general made a nuisance of themselves to call attention to some specific issue. Likewise with the anti-war demos in the 60s, which were equally as effective and they, too, were action minded. They burnt draft cards, the U.S. flag, massed outside recruiting stations, and the Pentagon voicing anti-war slogans. They shut down college campuses, and took over more than a few. Both forms of civil disobedience were challenging to the system in ways that inspired others to act, which took our national liberation struggle and the anti-war movement to higher ground. (And when unavoidable, they also took their lumps.)

I just don't see any of that happening today. I see none of the spontaneity that once was. Much of what goes on out there today reminds me of ginger bread cookies, everything being stamped out so orderly and neat, and predictable 'til one can almost time his return home to catch his favorite movie or TV show. I am not suggesting that people be stupid in what they do. But I am suggesting you should be more engaged and thus intensify the social contradictions.

Since Assata's liberation, Dhoruba Bin Wahad's and Geronimo Pratt's release, and the supportive effort to keep the state from killing Mumia Abu-Jamal, we've created no significant victories to celebrate. And if the truth be told, we still have yet to implement survival programs in our respective communities. Can we honestly say we are on the path where we can feed, clothe, shelter, and provide even minimal health care needs to our respective communities? If we take on the challenge to be leaders, then let us lead by example. And we could do more for our young people by encouraging them to get more involved and engaged in our day-to-day struggles. We need to also give serious thought to building an alternative economy. The time is now!

In my view, these kinds of considerations are what will rally the people, and only through them can we build a solid base of support, and with them we can move mountains. The people are all the resource we need! And if you are serious about amnesty (hate that word because of its implications but y'all know what I mean) for our PPs/POWs, then get busy! Let the world know you are serious through a sustained national/international campaign. The same goes for stopping prison expansion or for any campaign we embark upon. Believe me, I deeply regret being captured and confined behind prison walls. But even while in here, the struggle goes on.

Freedom in our lifetime and in solidarity I greet you,

HERMAN BELL

Written for Critical Resistance, September 1998

Herman Bell is a long-time activist in the Black Liberation Movement, one of the New York Three, imprisoned for more than 25 years. He is profiled in *Can't Jail the Spirit* (1998), and on the Prison Activist Resource Center web site at [www.prisonactivist.org/pps+pows/bell.html](http://www.prisonactivist.org/pps+pows/bell.html). His address is Herman Bell # 79-C-262, PO Box 51, Comstock NY 12821.

## **Message to Critical Resistance**

**Marilyn Buck, Susan Crane, Linda Evans,  
Dylcia Pagán, Alicia Rodríguez, Ida Luz Rodríguez,  
Carmen Valentín, and Laura Whitehorn**

What does this conference mean to us inside – the political prisoners and Prisoners of War? Simply spoken, your activism and commitment give us hope. Over 1000 people coming together marks a real advance in the development of the prison movement: a chance to consolidate and unify, build ways to communicate between different communities, to strategize and act together to win desperately-needed changes for all prisoners. It's appropriate and significant that your discussions come in the midst of action: last weekend's massive student walkout demanded "money for Schools, not Jails" and October's state-wide caravan will demand prison medical care and an end to police murder and brutality against California's prisoners.

Our own dedication to the struggle to win change continues in you. While you participate in these workshops, remember that the political prisoners and POWs should be sitting next to you – and we would be, if only we were free. In fact, many of our comrades – former POWs and political prisoners, stand in your midst today. Like you, most of us were and are prison activists: volunteer teachers, active with prison religious communities, leaders of prison strikes and walkouts, jailhouse lawyers, founders of AIDS education groups and other programs that benefit our fellow prisoners.

The US government has tried to disappear us, denying that we are in prison because of our political beliefs and motivations. When you embrace us as an integral part of building critical resistance, you give us strength, and you expose one more of this government's lies. Most of us have been in prison well over a decade now – many of us, locked away from our families and our communities for 20 or even 30 years. We are in prison precisely because we acted to make REAL our collective vision of a better society – to win liberation for Puerto Rico and other colonized nations, to fight white supremacy and stop US imperialism's dominion over the world, to end militarism and nuclear catastrophe.

We respect and welcome this conference because you are showing your determination to resist this government's program of repression and imprisonment. We urge you to act also as part of the campaigns to free the POWs and political prisoners, so we can once again join our efforts with yours in building resistance. The determination and knowledge you take with you from this conference will multiply *only* if you take action, to make justice a reality *now*.

**Free All Prisoners of War and Political Prisoners! Abolish the Death Penalty and Stop the Execution of Mumia Abu-Jamal! Shut the Prisons Down!**

Written for Critical Resistance, September 17, 1998

Dylcia Pagán, Alicia Rodríguez, Ida Luz (Lucy) Rodríguez and Carmen Valentín are Puerto Rican Prisoners of War. Marilyn Buck, Linda Evans and Laura Whitehorn are North American anti-imperialist political prisoners. Susan Crane is one of the Prince of Peace Plowshares prisoners of conscience. All the contributors are held at the Federal Correctional Institution for women in Dublin, California.

# Bones

## Marilyn Buck

i  
Clacking keys announce your presence  
a stalker that needs no silence  
your eyes sweep the hall  
searching out encounters

my bones tell me who you are

your eyes sight in on me  
you bark my name  
    an obscenity in your mouth  
my eyes meet yours  
you recoil ...  
    too late

my bones unearth your history

ii  
you press against the corner  
the hunter in his blind  
listening  
your tongue cuts loose  
    Buck!  
    You speak Spanish, Buck!  
an accusation  
    I know what you're saying!  
Ana Luz laughs: ¿Es ilegal hablar  
    de la comida?      Ah, you speak  
Spanish, Mr. Kane.  
    one woman wonders if you are Latino  
    your black hair, your moustache ...

your eyes flash  
an M-16 in shadowed forests  
    No! No! No!  
    I'm an American!  
    But I've been there  
Where, Mr. Kane?

compañeros' bones murmur  
from beneath tropical forest floors

si, estaba aquí  
yes, he was here

iii  
you hunker in the darkened cell  
rifling meager possessions  
I stop in the door  
you start  
    Get out! No! Halt!  
    Are those books yours?  
    There's a map ...  
I stand still  
is this a trap?  
    ... the island where I was  
Tiger Island, la isla de la tigre

bones clatter in my chest

    you said you were in traffic control  
San Salvador? Honduras?  
an island off El Salvador! ...  
Hunter Kane steps from shadows  
trophy in his grin  
    yes, but not there  
    advisor in the countryside  
    you know ...

my bones snap  
the sound of .223s slap flesh  
"jungle" boots dance in blood

yes, I know  
death stench settles on my bones  
when you stride prison halls

but you do not know  
my bones are not mine alone  
we are wherever you are

not always prisoners

Winter 1997 © Marilyn Buck

Marilyn Buck is a North American anti-imperialist political prisoner, held at the Federal Correctional Institution for women in Dublin, California. She is profiled in *Can't Jail the Spirit* (1998), and on the Prison Activist Resource Center web site at [www.prisonactivist.org/pps+pows/buck.html](http://www.prisonactivist.org/pps+pows/buck.html). Her address is Marilyn Buck, # 00482-285 Unit A, 5701 8th Street, Camp Parks, Dublin, CA 94568.

Block Print  
Marilyn Buck



## Excerpts from: The Cold War of the 90's

Jalil Abdul Muntaqim

On May 12th, 1994, the *Wall Street Journal* featured an article entitled: "Making Crime Pay – Triangle of Interest Created Infrastructure To Fight Lawlessness – Cities See Jobs; Politicians Sense a Popular Issue and Businesses Cash In – The Cold War of the 90's." ... The "Triangle of Interest" has set the stage for the resurrection of slavery in America, since this peculiar institution was never abolished ... for those who have been "duly convicted of a crime." ... About three-quarters of new admissions to American jails and prisons are New Afrikans and Hispanic men. ...

The [Critical Resistance] conference should be endorsed by all progressive and revolutionary minded people, and conferees should be called upon to forge an agenda based on the following issues:

1. Recognition of the existence of political prisoners in US prisons, and demand their amnesty/release.
2. Call for a moratorium on prison construction, and demand that persons working in the areas of criminal justice (judges, attorneys, corrections personnel, politicians, etc.) are prohibited from investing in prisons or in corporations investing in prisons.
3. Call for the end of death penalty laws and a moratorium on executions.
4. Call for the end of isolation-sensory deprivation prison/units, and the prohibition of the use of instruments of torture and the beating of prisoners.
5. Call for the re-establishment of higher education and training programs in all state and Federal prisons.

These five issues are the minimum concerns that need to be addressed immediately, in so doing this conference will serve to develop a foundation for a serious struggle to end human rights violation and prison slavery in America.

Written for Critical Resistance, September 1998 © Jalil Abdul Muntaqim

Jalil Abdul Muntaqim is a long-time activist in the Black Liberation Movement, one of the New York Three, imprisoned in New York. He issued the initial call for Jericho '98. He is profiled in *Can't Jail the Spirit* (1998), and on the Prison Activist Resource Center web site at [www.prisonactivist.org/pps+pows/jbottom.html](http://www.prisonactivist.org/pps+pows/jbottom.html). His address is Jalil Anthony Bottom # 77A4283, PO Box 338, Napanoch NY 12458. Excerpted from a pamphlet published for the Critical Resistance conference, September 1998, including material from an earlier version, "America's Private Gulag," published in *Counterpunch* (Washington, DC).

## Letter from FCI Dublin Susan Crane

Dear Friends,

Thank you all for sending cards and words of encouragement. You have written from across the U.S. , from California to Maine, and several distant countries -- France, England, the Netherlands, Austrcia, Germany... When the women around me in jail or prison comment about the volume of my mail, I share my cards with them and explain that people around the world want peace.

Right before Christmas I was moved to a Federal prison in California. Although physical conditions in the prison are much better than in the county jail -- here I can move around, go outside, have a job teaching other prisoners, exercise and even go to Mass, the injustice of a system that imprisons political prisoners for decades, and uses conspiracy laws and false testimony to imprison others for years, is always present.

This year I have received news which has brought hope and inspiration -- children from the Bruderhof community have written about the Children's Crusade, people who have traveled to the School of the Americas in Georgia have written about the protest there, people wrote from Israel where they held a vigil for Mordechai Vanunu, and most recently students from Maine have written about their continued actions for peace at Bath Iron Works.

The children from the Bruderhof Community regularly write to prisoners. After writing to Mumia Abu-Jamal and other death row prisoners, they decided to hold a Children's Crusade to speak out against the death penalty. The children walked 35 miles over 3 days to SCI Greene in Pennsylvania, singing songs they had written, and carrying flowers and balloons. The courage and moral conviction of these children is a source of hope to us all.

Over the summer, people wrote from Israel about a vigil in front of Ashkelon Prison, where Mordechai Vanunu has been held for 11 years in solitary confinement because he alerted the world to Israel's secret nuclear arsenal.

Then in November, about 2,500 people from Maine and California and all places in between traveled to Fort Benning where the School of the Americas trains soldiers from Latin American countries in the techniques of terror and torture. About 600 people walked through the main gate and were arrested.

More recently, Audrey and Jessica Stewart and Steve Cohen went to BIW and poured blood on the USS Mahan and articulately spoke to the Maine community about the need for disarmament.

Here at the prison, there are women from all over the world. I hear Spanish, Korean, Laotian and many languages I can't identify, but the common language is kindness and generosity. Our disarmament action at BIW was a reminder to all of us that we need to love our enemies, not build weapons to kill them. Here at the prison, where the situation humbles us, I experience that love in action, and a generosity of spirit among the prisoners.

Thanks again for your support and prayers.  
Christ's peace to you.

Love,

Susan

January, 1998

**Susan Crane is one of the Prince of Peace Plowshares activists, currently in prison for her disarmament actions against the U.S. military. You can write to her at Susan Crane, W-88783-011, FCI Dublin, Unit A, 5701 8th St., Dublin, CA 94568.**

# Message to Critical Resistance

Lucy Rodríguez

Hello Compañeras and Compañeros,

My name is Lucy Rodríguez. i am a Puerto Rican Prisoner of War incarcerated since April 4, 1980. That is to say that 18-1/2 years have been spent in prison because of my commitment to the anti-colonial struggle of my nation. During this time, i have been locked away behind prison barriers.

As a prisoner, i've had to learn to rely on myself. Given these circumstances and also my own strong desire for liberation, the question WHO AM I ? arose in importance and became firmly rooted in my conscious mind and dreams.

The question WHO AM I? brought to my attention the parts of myself that i had sacrificed in the name of freedom. As i continued to work with this question, i became acutely aware that self-sacrifice is not helpful nor does it serve the goal of liberation. Quite the contrary! It serves the interests of colonialism, especially considering the ways in which colonialism feeds off the colonized person's sense of invisibility and inferiority.

Once i brought to my attention those aspects of myself that I had made invisible, i made space and allowed them to become an active part of my life. It was then that i felt truly engaged in a dialectical process seeking balance between self-awareness and revolutionary social consciousness. i've sought ever newer forms of struggle and being in this world. i do believe that my life is critical resistance or at least an honest attempt to make it so.

i love to work with computers. For years, i worked for the prison doctor translating and desktop publishing public health information. i've made countless brochures, pamphlets, booklets, fliers and calendars. i also dedicated years to helping women learn computer software.

My passion is the potter's wheel which keeps me true to my center.

Written for Critical Resistance, September 1998

Lucy (Ida Luz) Rodríguez is a Puerto Rican POW held at the Federal Correctional Institution for women in Dublin, California. She is profiled in *Prisoners of Colonialism* by Ronald Fernandez (1994, Common Courage Press), *Can't Jail the Spirit* (1998), and on the Prison Activist Resource Center web site at [www.prisonactivist.org/pps+pows/descrip/ida-luz-rodriguez.html](http://www.prisonactivist.org/pps+pows/descrip/ida-luz-rodriguez.html). Her address is Unit A, 5701 8th Street, Camp Parks, Dublin, CA 94568.

## **Message to Critical Resistance**

**Alicia Rodríguez**

Warm Greetings! My name is Alicia Rodríguez. I am a Puerto Rican woman, Prisoner of War, who throughout 18 years of incarceration has practiced critical resistance. As a result, I feel a sense of lightness after shedding layer upon layer of a colonized mentality. Self-awareness of my integrity and dignity is extremely important to me, given the fact that prison is designed to destroy these precious human qualities. It is extremely important for me to preserve and nurture who I am and who I struggle to be as a woman, anti-colonial combatant in the Puerto Rican independence movement.

I find it necessary to note that since the beginning of my incarceration, I have imagined the presence of a child always walking alongside of me. Maybe, this child is really me, keeping me connected, curious and responsible. Therefore, for the sake of this "child," I have worked to remain conscious of my thoughts, attitudes and behavior. It has never mattered what conditions I have found myself in. I have always sensed the power of choice and the fact that I am never alone. I have never felt isolated even during periods of solitary confinement in prison. I have remained aware of my connections to myself, family, friends, and political struggle. Most of all, I have learned to acknowledge my intuition.

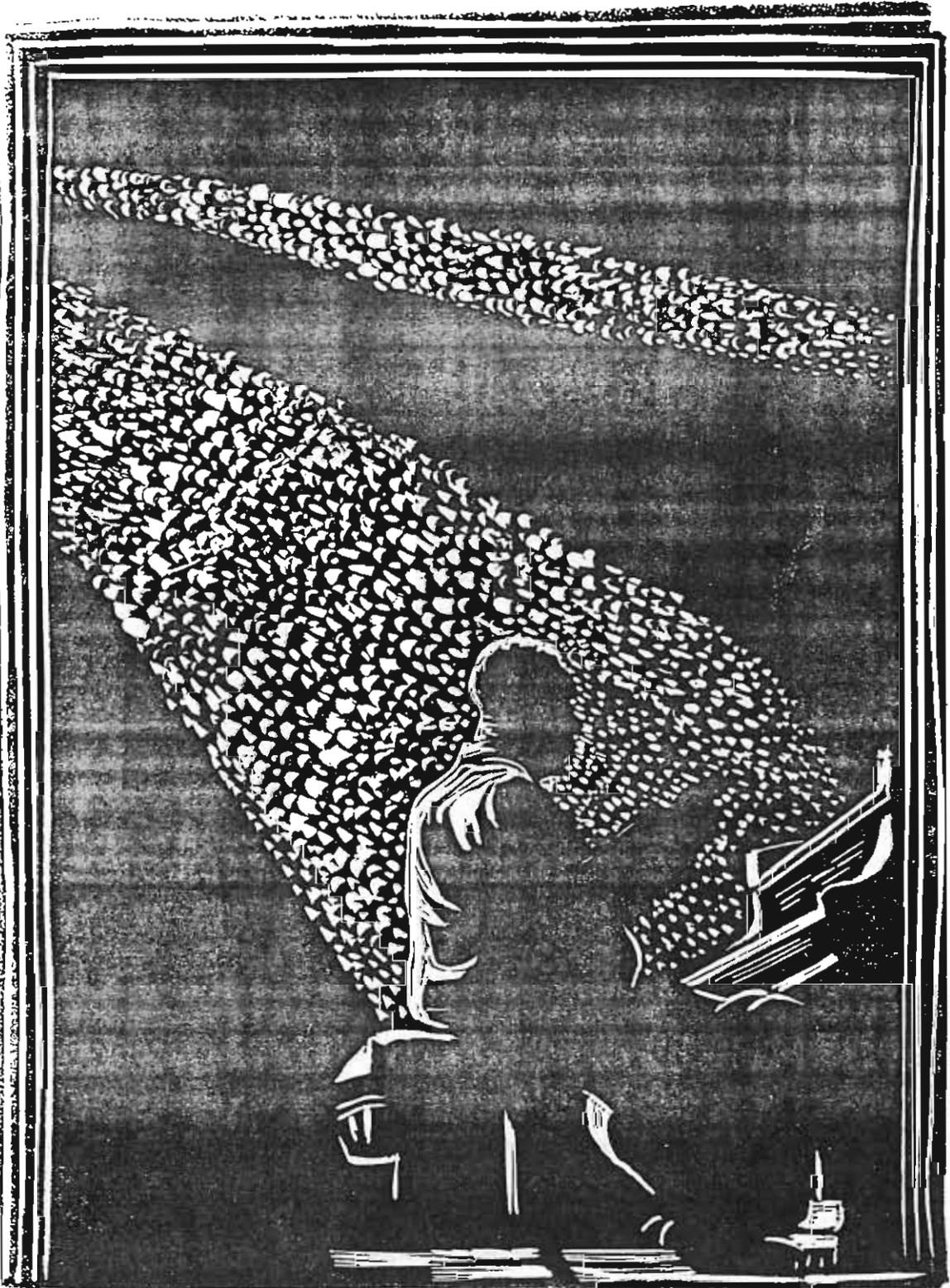
When I speak of choices, I am reminded of an incident that took place in 1988, eight years after my incarceration. At that time, I approached the warden of the woman's state prison in Dwight, IL. I questioned her regarding the arbitrary... and repressive procedures carried out solely against me. I approached the warden, because it was blatant that I was politically targeted in order to wear down my resistance. The warden's response was devoid of human compassion. She told me then that while I was incarcerated there I would never experience... a loosening of controls over my person. And true to her words, the prison apparatus focused upon me laser light scrutiny and control. I endured extremely difficult living conditions. I was treated (as I continue to be) as a "dangerous terrorist." But in the long run, it did not break down my resistance. It didn't because I experienced the freedom to choose how I saw and continue to see myself. I know who I am, my political and human self is crystal clear to me. I have remained committed to the struggle against colonialism not withstanding my incarceration.

I have never possessed the key to unlock the prison door and walk away from a dehumanizing environment. I have been forced to live within a reality where society's economic, political and social dynamics negatively play out. But I choose not to let myself become disheartened nor to put up false barriers between the other prisoners and myself. I realized soon enough that the pain and suffering of the women prisoners were also my own and the only difference between us was my critical resistance. This led me to become an AIDS educator and a volunteer instructor in the literacy program. I was also trained and worked as a cosmetologist as a way to further connect and provide a service to the women. As a further challenge to the dehumanizing prison conditions, I graduated *magna cum laude* from Illinois State University.

Written for Critical Resistance, September 1998

Alicia Rodríguez is Puerto Rican Prisoner of War, held at the Federal Correctional Institution for women in Dublin, California. She is profiled in *Prisoners of Colonialism* by Ronald Fernandez (1994, Common Courage Press), *Can't Jail the Spirit* (1998), and on the Prison Activist Resource Center web site at [www.prisonactivist.org/pps+pows/descrip/alicia-rodriguez.html](http://www.prisonactivist.org/pps+pows/descrip/alicia-rodriguez.html). Her address is Unit B, 5701 8th Street, Camp Parks, Dublin, CA 94568.

Block Print  
Laura Whitehorn



# **Open Letter to Supporters of "Recognized" Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War**

**Russell "Maroon" Shoats**

I would like to offer a few words on the successful launching of a unified "amnesty" campaign for political prisoners and Prisoners of War (PP/POWs) centered in this country.

The "Jericho '98" demonstrations held in Washington, D.C., San Francisco, Los Angeles and elsewhere were a milestone in our efforts to win the release of PP/POWs. In that connection, I believe the primary organizers and all of the participants deserve the credit for making this historical event one that all of us can say marks the beginning of a renewed international effort to free some of our most tenacious, committed and knowledgeable freedom fighters. It also was a step in the right direction in helping a new generation of freedom fighters to come together and draw energy and inspiration from their assembled contemporaries, and the veterans of many historic campaigns and battles of the past.

I salute you all!

Consistent with that effort and building on Jalil A. Muntaqim's "From Jericho '98 to the Year 2000!", I would stress our need to place more immediate attention on getting the various "Jericho Organizing Committees" (JOCs) to recognize our need to more effectively link our efforts with those of the grass-roots poor and oppressed peoples efforts to combat the racist, imperialist criminal "just-us" system(s) and their growing "Prison Industrial Complex(es)." And, in that regard, the center of gravity; the center of power rests with organizing the "immediate families" of the hundreds of thousands of oppressed prisoners being held captive. Those who have already taken action to force their immediate concerns to the forefront of the political debate, especially the families struggling against the various mandatory minimum sentencing laws, struggling against their relatives' receiving the death penalty and being executed, against the unjust cocaine sentencing laws, against the cut-backs in the hard-won, family-oriented prison programs of the last generation, against the efforts of the right-wingers to lock their children away with no provisions for their rehabilitation, against the growing crisis presented by the ever-increasing imprisonment of women, and the immediate ripple effect amongst their offspring and relatives, and the myriad issues and concerns that forever plague loved ones who attempt to remain close to those behind bars....

Amongst them the JOCs will find their most seasoned supporters and most powerful allies – a lobby that if carefully nurtured will prove to be a force far surpassing any other segments that the PP/POWs can hope to gain anything from but lip service – for the foreseeable future! They are the most oppressed element, the relatives of modern-day slaves who have nothing to lose but their chains.

Some will have reservations about this approach, fearing that the PP/POW issue will get lost or side-tracked if immersed in a generalized struggle against the criminal just-us system(s) and the Prison Industrial Complex(es). That, after all, did occur in the last generation. However, in truth, I must say that the fault rested with the progressive and revolutionary forces for failing to properly deal with what was then known as "the prison movement." We were outflanked by a series of shrewdly contrived concessions that in retrospect only served to tighten our chains. Though cautious, I've learned my lessons, discarded my phobias associated with this failure and now stand convinced that my freedom and that of most other "recognized" PP/POWs rests with and is dependent on fighting this battle in close alliance with the above-mentioned forces.

Embryonic efforts in that direction have been occurring in various locales for some time. In my immediate area progressives and revolutionaries from human rights activists, prison reformist, death penalty abolitionist, anarchists, nationalists, Pan-Africanists, "MOVE" members and supporters and families of prisoners have come together to mount a number of impressive efforts. They've marched on the state capitol, on a number of state prisons and attended the Washington Jericho '98 march. They've gradually built an emergency response network that's capable of placing "visitors" in any prison in the state system within hours of need. They've done a great deal, up to now, to neutralize the state's intention to execute Mumia Abu-Jamal and others sentenced to death, as well as help force this state's most oppressive prison (SCI Greene – at Waynesburg) to be more cautious in implementing its repressive policies. In that connection, their hundreds strong demonstrations (500+ on one occasion) and law suits against that facility helped to crystallize the issues around the death penalty and "Control Unit" prisoners that led to an unprecedented series of firings, demotions and disciplining of ranking officers at Waynesburg in the last three months (the Warden was demoted and transferred; two lieutenants were fired; the Major and a Captain were demoted; two other guards were fired and seven other Lieutenants received time off).

This coalition expressly recognizes the local PP/POWs, supports our demands for amnesty and always allows our advocates to address their rallies and otherwise work closely with us.

More importantly, there is a groundswell of prisoners in the state system who are being encouraged and educated by these efforts, and who themselves are beginning to look for ways they can join forces with us.

None of that progress could have been made without the efforts and participation of those grass-roots elements. And, in my opinion, they are nothing compared to what the future holds!

So, I encourage all who read this to consider doing something similar in their immediate areas, and in particular the JOCs. So that when the March 27, 1999 Jericho Marches and rallies are held in the various cities (see Jalil's "From Jericho '98 to the Year 2000!"), the "families" of locally oppressed prisoners will also show up to demand amnesty for those who are now "recognized" as PP/POWs, in a spirit of solidarity with those of us who are lending "immediate" aid to their loved ones' concerns.

In solidarity and struggle,  
Russell "Maroon". Shoats

Written for Critical Resistance, June 13 1998 © Russell "Maroon" Shoats

Russell "Maroon" Shoats is a New African Political Prisoner of War. He is profiled in *Can't Jail the Spirit* (1998) and on the web at <http://burn.ucsd.edu/~abcf/maroon.html>. His address is Russell Maroon Shoats # AF-3855, SCI Greene, 1040 E. Roy Furman Hwy, Waynesburg PA 15370-8090.

# Message to Critical Resistance

## Albert "Nuh" Washington

If someone would have told me that i would spend over twenty-seven years in prison, i would have told them they were crazy. As it is i did do time in some of the most violent prisons in New York and California. The wonder is i am not crazy.

But thinking i am not crazy could just be a delusion on my part because a court has found me insane and i have been committed to mental institutions on a few occasions and only released once. The other times i escaped. One might conclude that my life appears to be somewhat stormy. Maybe it is because of the day i entered the world.

I was born on a stormy February day in an apartment on Sugar Hill in New York City. My mother said if i had been born a girl she would have named me Gail because of the gale force winds blowing outside. The world was at war and nature was raging. I am a child of the storm. I am the second born and the first to survive. The pattern was set and has been consistent ever since.

I was a member of the Black Panther Party and when the split went down some of us went underground into the Black Liberation Army. In political education classes we learned that all things are interconnected, that nothing is isolated from something else. My life's journey would take me to places and circumstances which would result in spending the last 27 years in prison.

I was in Colorado when the Marin courthouse shoot-out took place and in San Francisco when George Jackson was killed in San Quentin. His brother Jonathan would impress me and the murder of George would anger me. The day of George's funeral Jalil and i would get involved with a shoot-out with the San Francisco police; i would be shot, tried, convicted for three counts of assaulting a police officer and sentenced to six months to life. Later along with Herman Bell and Jalil Bottom i would be convicted of two counts of murder of two New York City policemen. The charges would make me a maximum security prisoner and my political affiliations would make me a security risk from the day i entered the county jail and every prison or detention center since. My first seven years were spent in prisons within a prison, and i had no contact visits and my mail was regularly withheld and delayed.

In Folsom they would hold my letters for months at a time, make it hard for people to see me, leaving me feeling isolated and alone. The racial strife and psychological warfare were bugging guys out. Paranoia was rampant and infectious. Fortunately for me life had prepared me for those/these times. The years in the bughouse had prepared me well. My loose bottom teeth were a reminder to stay alert, and years of listening and watching sharpen the senses to changes in mood and attitude.

Learning how to meditate taught me how to relax and learning to pray gave me confidence to accept whatever might come.

Assata Shakur once asked me what would i rather do, eat a nasty bowl of Nixon's shit or do twenty years in prison. My reply was twenty years. She said she would eat the shit because everyday in prison you eat shit and it is better to eat it all at once. For 27 years i have eaten shit each day, which brings its own indignities, being under the physical control of another who is basically hostile to you. Like in the adjustment center we were strip searched coming and going to the yard. In the Tombs i had a guard sitting in front of my cell, watching me 24 hours a day. In San Francisco i would awake to being stared at as i slept or being awakened and told to "show some skin". At Clinton i would be threatened and assaulted.

Then there are the personal things that are inflicted on you. Often if i was subjected to a policy that covered the majority of convicts i'd take it in stride but there are things done to an individual by caprice and whims. I had applied for the Family Reunion program commonly referred to as a trailer visit as i fit the criteria: no write-ups in the time prescribed and i was legally married before i entered the system. My wife at the time had said "put in for it" as other comrades had been approved and it appeared that being a political prisoner would not deprive me of this privilege. So i applied and the time went by and I made inquiries about my status. I was told that the people in Albany were sitting on it. Two years later i found out that i had been approved but that the deputy commissioner had put a note in my file that i should never have been approved because the program was not meant for people like me and not to schedule me without his approval.

By then the commissioner was gone and so was my wife. In 1990 lifers in New York were allowed to marry. So i find someone who married me after the state put us through a lot of changes. Again i applied for the Family Reunion program and was denied by every deputy of security in the prisons i applied at.

It is hard to explain to another why things given to others are denied to you and i came to realize that my existence in here would always be rough. I've been denied visits because the name was misspelled on the form or the guard said an ID wasn't correct. I've been subjected to one-hour screen visits without any rule infractions. I was denied transfer to a prison closer to my family when my father got sick. As a rule you can visit a terminally ill immediate family member or attend the funeral. I was denied both. In 1991 i went to MCC for a hearing and every time i came out of the cell i was handcuffed and shackled. One time i complained of the cuffs being too tight and the young Black guard told me i should get used to it.

I was taught that there is a positive and negative aspect to all phenomena. So in spite of what the state has done i've earned a B.A. in social science and become one of the first prisoners trained as an AIDS counselor as i followed up the work begun by David Gilbert, comrade and fellow political prisoner who asked me to see that his program was implemented. I have a few loyal friends who looked out for me, and Njeri whose love and common sense would never let me give in to anger and despair. She died and left me with insights so that i can carry on without her. And of course, to do all this time one needs a sense of humor, without which i would be stark-raving mad instead of crazy.

Written for Critical Resistance, September 1998

**Albert "Nuh" Washington is a long-time activist in the Black Liberation Movement, one of the New York Three, imprisoned for more than 25 years. He is profiled in *Can't Jail the Spirit* (1998), and on the Prison Activist Resource Center web site at [www.prisonactivist.org/pps+pows/nuh-st.html](http://www.prisonactivist.org/pps+pows/nuh-st.html). His address is Albert Nuh Washington # 77-A-1528 PO Box 2001 - CCF Main, Dannemora, NY 12929.**

Block Print  
Susan Crane



# For Standing Deer Wilson and All Righteous Old Men and Women in Prison

Laura Whitehorn

This is for the old ones  
the wise ones  
the grey heads  
the old legs  
that make it up out  
of the bunk  
stiff as that steel slab  
in the thin dusty light  
of another day.

This is for the old ones  
the quiet ones  
the ones who know  
when to speak out  
and when to keep their own  
counsel  
Long, pain-filled lives  
no perks  
no bribes  
no easy jobs  
no cigars  
perfume  
brandy  
pizza  
or braised beef sandwiches . . .

This is for the old ones  
the plain ones  
without fancy metaphors  
or flashy alliteration  
the ones whose mail  
dwindles  
year by year . . .  
the ones who wake up  
one cold prison  
morning  
to find that the young ones  
call them "Pops" or  
"Grandma."

This is for the ones . . .  
nourished  
by their own muscle  
sinew  
soul  
this is for the steadfast

This is a love poem  
for those so full of heart

FCI Dublin, 1998 © Laura Whitehorn

Laura Whitehorn is a North American anti-imperialist political prisoner, held at the Federal Correctional Institution for women in Dublin, California. She is profiled in *Can't Jail the Spirit* (1998), and on the Prison Activist Resource Center web site at [www.prisonactivist.org/pps+pows/descrip/whitehorn.html](http://www.prisonactivist.org/pps+pows/descrip/whitehorn.html). Her address is Unit A, 5701 8th Street, Camp Parks, Dublin, CA 94568. This poem was published in *Out Of Time*, the newspaper of Out of Control—Lesbian Committee to Support Women Political Prisoners, No. 43, 1998.

# Notes from the Unrepententiary

Laura Whitehorn

The Jericho '98 rally in Washington, D.C. on March 27th was, I hope, a step in the direction of freeing all u.s.-held political prisoners and Prisoners of War. Vigorous action of all kinds - both domestic and international - will be needed to win the release of political prisoners. Radical politics of national liberation and to end white supremacy and colonialism produced the acts that ended in the imprisonment of over 100 political women and men. Our actions challenged the u.s. government - so it is not surprising that we find it nearly impossible to win release through the normal channels (few as they are) open to most prisoners. For example, the Federal and State Parole Boards most often politicize the process of release on parole, so that a political prisoner applying for parole is required to renounce her beliefs or apologize for his actions even to be considered for release.

Pursuing Jericho '98 as a long-term campaign is, therefore, necessary to political prisoners and POW's in the u.s. I think it will also be helpful to all prisoners in u.s. custody. Some people have said that supporting political prisoners is elitist, tending to ignore the plight of other prisoners. But I think the two causes are fundamentally linked, and can each best be served by embracing the other.

Many of the people who are now political prisoners and POWs did work in support of prisoners for years before our arrests. We did that work because it was a clear, basic part of fighting injustice in this classist and racist society. Some of us first met one another in groups agitating for better prison conditions, or to raise bail for women in jail, or to support the Attica Brothers and other prisoners who rebelled against inhuman situations in the prisons of the 60's, 70's and 80's. Whether the goal was to abolish prisons or to reform them, activists from the various movements for justice included the u.s. prison system in the list of oppressive institutions that demanded change.

The goals shared by today's u.s.-held political prisoners still include fundamental change in the prison system, and activities demanding the release of political prisoners also bring attention to the prisons as a whole, along with other examples of u.s. racism, colonialism, and class exploitation. Prisons in the u.s. are good business - something Angela Davis and other activists point out when they talk about the "prison/ industrial complex".

Prisons are also implements of genocide and counter-insurgency- as Dr. Mutulu Shakur and other New Afrikan POWs have analyzed in articles and interviews.

This aspect of the prison system is most clearly exposed by looking at how prisons suppress and more than decimate the Black, Puerto Rican, Mexicano, and Native American Nations in the u.s. empire, together with how they repress the radical political movements and leadership in those nations and in the white left. On the one hand, the u.s. imprisons vast numbers of young Third World people, so that their lives are destroyed and the lives of their communities disrupted. On the other hand, the government metes out harsh punishment to those political activists and revolutionaries who dare to build militant resistance to injustice. Together, these strategies produce an effective program of genocide: destroying the life of oppressed nations and their ability to fight for liberation. The massive incarceration of Black, Latino, and Native American women and men is meant to unravel the fabric of those communities, while the disproportionate sentences and conditions of confinement of political prisoners and POWs is intended not only to destroy the political organizations that exist, but also to frighten others from attempting resistance.

I said at the beginning of this column that I think international activity is needed for the release of political prisoners in this country. That's because we have to embarrass the u.s., to force them to admit that they hold political prisoners - something they deny. Without international pressure, they'll never admit that this supposed democracy, busy lecturing the world on human rights, imprisons people for political acts as well as on frame-ups and railroads. Already there have been some moments when international attention has been turned on u.s.-held political prisoners- the clearest example was the world-wide support for our brother Mumia Abu-Jamal. I think we need to direct international attention to the conditions all u.s.-held prisoners face, as well as to the obscene rate at which people are being incarcerated. If Jericho '98 and other campaigns on behalf of political prisoners do our work well, we can help to focus international attention on the u.s. prison system as a whole.

In the 70's, I worked in a group fighting the FBI's COINTELPRO and supporting New Afrikan POWs. I remembered talking to people about Geronimo ji jaga, Sundiata Acoli, Assata Shakur (who was then still in prison). Explaining who these comrades were, why they were in prison and why they received such harsh treatment helped show people that the u.s. democracy was phony, that fighting for human rights was answered by government repression, and that u.s. "justice" was anything but just. Learning about political prisoners often served as a first step for people to open their eyes to the broader inequalities in this country - including questioning the nature of the prison system, who goes to prison, and how the prison system affects and exposes the very nature of u.s. society.

Prison work of all kinds is plagued by a lack of resources. Joining hands whenever we can will help us all. If political prisoner support work is done in an elitist fashion, that should be changed. Mostly it feels to us inside that there's room for a lot more activity on all fronts. **Jericho '98** is a start towards filling the gap. The "**Critical Resistance**" conference on prisons, coming up in September and organized by activists in California, is another. **Free All Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War - AND Tear Down the Walls!**

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