

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2010/07/11/letters-from-the-torture-chambers-solitary-confinement-and-political-repression/>

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by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#) | July 11, 2010

*Editors Note: [Bonnie Kerness](#) of the American Friends Service Committees [Prison Watch Project](#) was one of the first Americans to name the widespread use of solitary confinement in U.S. prisons as a form of torture. Her longtime battle against this practice is just one chapter in a lifetime spent in various forms of social justice activism. On June 25, Kerness delivered the following speech at the US Social Forum. She described the abuses taking place in control units, supermax prisons, and special housing units across the country, and said she had made a promise to those dead and alive to abolish these torture chambers.*

*Kerness also placed the use of solitary confinement in a wider political context, advising her audience: Our work today needs to be embedded in struggle against this system and its continued use of isolation and torture as a tool of behavior modification and political repression. Speaking of prison lockdown units, she said: No matter what name they are given, their purpose is the same as in Abu Ghraib or Guantanamo: the breaking of minds.*

Since 1975, I've served as a human rights advocate on behalf of people in prison throughout the country, coordinating the Prison Watch Project for the American Friends Service Committee in Newark. Many of the men, women and children that I take testimony from call their imprisonment the war at home and neo-slavery. Using captive human beings to generate income as well as a labor force is an integral part of what we have come to know as the Prison Industrial Complex.

In the criminal justice system, the police, the courts, the prison system and the death penalty all demonstrate the racism and classism which governs our lives in the US. Every part of the criminal justice system falls most heavily on the poor and people of color, including the fact that slavery is mandated in prisons by the 13th Amendment of the US constitution which reads Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States. While most of us don't give this amendment a second thought, it is at the core of how the labor of slaves was transformed into the neo-slavery of prisons.

In the mid 80s I received a letter from Ojore Lutalo who had just been placed in the Management Control Unit at Trenton State Prison. He asked what a control unit was, why he was in there and how long he would have to stay. We knew little of control units, except for the 1983 lockdown of the Marion Federal prison, and what we learned from the many prisoners who reached out to the AFSC to mentor those of us trying to give voice to what was and is happening.

We began hearing from people throughout the country saying that they were prisoners being held in extended isolation for political reasons. We heard from jailhouse lawyers, Muslims and prisoner activists many of whom also found themselves targeted and locked down in 24/7 solitary confinement. The AFSC began contacting people inside and outside the prisons to collect testimonies of what was going on in those isolation units. We had no idea how many people were experiencing this form of torture, the conditions in those units and how many control units there were.

I want to share with you some voices that I hear during my day.

I went in when I was 14. They have what they call the hole. Kids that fight go in there. If you refuse they come and get you. You get a shower once a week and they bring the food to you. I was so cold.

In Elizabeth, NJ, Eddie Sinclair, Jr. hung himself in the Union County Youth detention facility; Eddie was 17 and had stolen a bicycle. He had missed a court appointment, was picked up and locked in isolation. It is not irrelevant that Eddie's father is African and his mother is Puerto Rican.

John was directed to leave the strip cell and a urine soaked pillow case was placed over his head like a hood. He was walked, shackled and hooded to a different cell where he was placed in a device called the chair where he was kept for over 30 hours resulting in extreme physical and emotional suffering.

Another describes being knocked to the ground, kicked and maced in his eyes. He then gives a detailed description of the beating with shields and batons the guards refer to as nigger beaters.

A woman wrote saying, I was locked in isolation, sitting there week after week, month after month. Not once was I ever taken out of my cell which had a window that was four inches wide. I started to rub my nails against the rubber seal around the window. It was a thick, hard rubber which I rubbed for months with bleeding nails. It took 8 months to get a tiny opening to feel fresh air.

Another wrote, the guard sprayed me with pepper spray because I wouldn't take my clothes off in front of five male guards. They carried me to my isolation cell, laid me down on a steel bed and took my clothes off, leaving me with that pepper spray burning my face.

Many prisoners write on behalf of the thousands of mentally ill in isolation like the man who spread feces over his body. The guards' response was to put him in a bath so hot it boiled 30 percent of the skin off him.

How do you describe desperation to someone who is not desperate? began a letter to me from Ojore Lutalo, who went on to depict everyone in the Control Unit being awakened by guards dressed in riot gear holding barking, salivating dogs at 1 a.m. every other morning. Once awakened, the prisoners were forced to strip, gather their belongings while feeling the dogs straining at their leashes snapping at their private parts as they are trained to do. He described being terrorized, intimidated, and the humiliation of being naked and not knowing whether the masked guards were male or female. These went on for months, until activists inside and out were able to stop this senseless torture. If we think back to slavery and to images of the civil rights movement we understand that dogs have been used as a device of torture for hundreds of years in the US.

The thread that binds all of the above testimonies is that they are from men, women and children who are being held in isolation and who are experiencing the use of chemical, physical and psychological devices of torture in human cages where there are few witnesses. I have received thousands of descriptions and drawings of sexual slavery by guards, four and five point restraints, restraint hoods, restraint belts, restraint beds, stun grenades, stun guns, stun belts, spit hoods, chain gangs, black boxes, tethers, waist and leg chains.

The history of control units began with the movements of the 60s and 70s. My generation genuinely believed that each of us was free to dissent politically. In those years, people acted out this belief in a number of ways. Native peoples contributed to the formation of the American Indian Movement dedicated to self-determination; Puerto Ricans joined the movement to free the island from US colonialism; Whites formed the Students for a Democratic Society and anti-imperialist groups, while others worked in the southern Civil Rights movements. This was also a time that the New Afrikan Independence Movement reasserted itself; the Black Panther Party for Self Defense was formed because children were (and still are) being shot in the streets, as well as a time where there was a distinct rise in the prisoner rights movement. It was time when television news had graphic pictures of State Troopers, Police, the FBI, and the National Guard killing our peers. It was a time when I saw on the evening news the bullet holes fired by police into Panther Fred Hampton's sleeping body, a time when young people protesting the Viet Nam War died on the Jackson and Kent State campuses killed by the National Guard, a time when civil rights workers were killed with impunity, and a time when we felt as if there was no opportunity to stop mourning because each day another activist was dead. These killings and other acts of oppression led to underground formations such as the Black Liberation Army.

The government, in response to this massive outcry against social inequities and for national liberation, utilized Counter Intelligence Programs called COINTELPRO conducted by a dozen federal agencies, which had as an objective the crippling of the Black Panther Party and other radical forces. Over the years that these directives were carried out, many of those young people who weren't murdered were put in prisons across the country. Some, now in their 60s and 70s are still there.

While the US denied that there were people being held for political reasons, there was no way to work with prisoners without hearing repeatedly of the existence of such people, and the particular treatment they endured once in prison. As early as 1978, Andrew Young, US Ambassador to the United Nations responded that there were hundreds, perhaps thousands of people I would describe as political prisoners in US prisons.

Across the nation, we saw an enhanced use of sensory deprivation units for such people in an attempt to instill behavior modification. It was this growing special treatment which we began monitoring. At the time, Ralph Arons, a former warden at Marion, was quoted at a congressional hearing as saying, The purpose of the Marion Control Unit is to control revolutionary attitudes in the prison system and in society at large.

For those of us who have been in the struggle for decades, the deliberate use of long-term sensory deprivation is haunting. People that we've known, worked with and loved have been, and are, being held in this manner. The names Ojore Lutalo; Sundiata Acoli, Assata Shakur, Marshall Eddie Conway, Albert Nuh Washington; Herman Bell, the Angola 3, Dhoruba Bin Wahad, Dr. Mutulu Shakur, Mumia Abu Jamal; Leonard Peltier, Jalil Muntaqim, Sekou Odinga, Ray Luc Levasseur, Kazi Toure; Leonard Peltier, Oscar Lopez Rivera, Alejandrina Torres, Dylcia Pagan, Bashir Hameed, Lorenzo Kombo Ervin; Richard Williams, Tom Manning, Merle and all of the Africas, Susan Rosenberg, Kwame Izequire, Laura Whitehorn, Russell Maroon Shoats, Linda Evans, Marilyn Buck, Imam Jamil Al-Amin these prisoners and hundreds of others haunt the spaces of every control unit, supermax prison, and special housing unit in the country. No matter what name they are given, their purpose is the same as in Abu Ghraib or Guantanamo the breaking of minds.

For people of my generation, our work is done with a lifetime passion and an understanding that the work is not risk free. We've made a promise to those dead and alive to abolish these torture chambers. People throughout the world are beginning to understand what the prisoners have been saying to us for decades about the oppressive, war-like tactics of the US government toward criticism or resistance. People in prison have warned us that what happens inside finds its way out here. In a May 5, 2009 article in *The Trentonian*, Afsheen Shamsi of the Council on American-Islamic Relations says that their coalition is upset over increasing surveillance in mosques. She said the group reflects the concerns of Muslims who have grown tired of being stopped at airports, constant questioning and relentless security, years after the attacks of 9/11.

The department of corrections is more than a set of institutions; it is a state of mind. It is that state of mind which expanded the use of isolation, the use of devices of torture, the Counter Intelligence Programs, and the Department of Homeland Security, against activists, both inside and outside the walls. Ojore, the man who first contacted us in 1986, was released from the control unit via litigation in 2002 after 16 years in isolation. In 2004, he was placed back into isolation with no explanation. When I called the Department of Corrections, I was finally informed that this was upon the request of Homeland Security. In a 2008 Classification decision, this was confirmed in

writing which said the Department continues to show concern regarding your admitted affiliation with the Black Liberation Army. Your radical views and ability to influence others poses a threat to the orderly operation of this Institution. Ojore examples the history of control units. After 22 years of living in isolation, he was released from prison in August of 2009 via court order. He also examples the perceived threat of Islam. On January 26th, he was kidnapped from an Amtrak train, accused of endangering public transportation and arrested in La Junta, Colorado. Because of his unusual name, newspaper articles had him being Muslim, threatening to bomb Amtrak and talking about Al Qaeda. A judge dismissed all charges one week later, enabling him to be here today.

Weve seen the progression of control units grow into security threat group management units. This is particularly egregious because it is the government which gets to define what a security threat group is. According to a national survey done by the Department of Justice in 1997, the Departments of Corrections of Minnesota and Oregon named *all* Asians as gangs, which Minnesota further compounds by adding *all* Native Americans. New Jersey, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania go on to list various Islamic groups as gangs. It is no surprise that these are all young men of color. Because my own background stems from the Civil Rights Era, I am very mindful of who is considered a security threat to this country and how they are treated. The repression and progression of the use of isolation is most recently known as Communications Management Units in federal prisons which are designed to restrict the communication of imprisoned Muslims and activists with their families, the media and the outside world. This treatment of prisoners is replicated in US secret prisons throughout the world where almost all of those captured are people of color.

In 2004, four Islamic prisoners in California were indicted on charges which included conspiracy to levy war against the US government. One result of this was a 2006 report called Out of The Shadows: Getting Ahead of Prisoner Radicalization by George Washington Universitys Homeland Security Policy Institute. The report states that the potential for radicalization of prison inmates poses a threat of unknown magnitude to the national security of the United States, noting that every radicalized prisoner becomes a potential terrorist threat. The report states that it focuses, in particular on religious radicalization in conjunction with the practice of Islam. In that same year, USA Today reported that the FBI and Homeland Security were urging prison administrators to set up more intelligence units in state prisons, with an emphasis on background checks to ensure that extremist Muslim clerics dont have access with prisoners.

For those of us monitoring US prisons over decades, the targeting of radicalization, the targeting of specific groups, the surveillance and infiltration of those groups feels very familiar. There can be no doubt that it is Islam and anything that can be defined as terrorism that is being targeted. In a un-terrorist recent case known as the Newburgh 4, a judge noted, that Equal Justice Under The Law are words that can be found on many courthouses, but far too often where it applies to the socially and/or politically marginalized, these are words devoid of meaning.

I believe what is happening to Imam Jamil Al-Amin and others is a vivid example of profiling because of his political history and his religion. The US government which has moved from the 1970s illegal Counter Intelligence Programs to the currently legalized Office of Homeland Security, continues to lock down people for their beliefs, and is still seeking to identify those who have the potential to politically radicalize others. After each Homeland Security Code change, Prison Watch is flooded with calls from people reporting Islamic loved ones being removed from general population and placed in isolation. I also have no doubt that Islam itself is suspect to the US government, and that any Muslim, any activist, any progressive element, no matter how law abiding, is suspect. Because of my own experience in being surveilled due to my work with people in prison, I have no doubt that this gathering itself is being monitored.

Our work today needs to be embedded in struggle against this system and its continued use of isolation and torture as a tool of behavior modification and political repression. Oppression is a condition common to all of us who are without the power to make the decisions that govern the political, economic and social life of this country. We are victims of an ideology of inhumanity on which this country was built. If we dig deeper into US practices, the political function that they serve is inescapable. The police, courts, prison system and death penalty are all mechanisms of social control. The economic function they serve is equally chilling. Just as in the era of chattel slavery, there is a class of people dependent on the poor, and on bodies of color as a source for income. How US prisons function violates the United Nations Convention Against Torture, and a host of other international treaties. Prison practices also fit the United Nations definition of genocide which includes: the killing of members of a racial or religious group; the causing of serious bodily harm to members of a particular group; deliberately inflicting on a group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction; imposing measures intended to prevent births within that group and; forcibly transferring children of that group to another group.

The AFSC recognizes the existence and continued expansion of the penal system as profound spiritual crises. It is a crisis that allows children to be demonized. It is a crisis which legitimizes torture, isolation and the abuse of power. It is a crisis which extends beyond prisons into school and judicial systems. I know each time we send a child to bed hungry that is violence. That wealth concentrated in the hands of a few at the expense of many is violence, that the denial of dignity based on race, class or religion is violence. And that poverty and prisons are a form of state-manifested violence.

Ive been part of the struggle for civil and human rights in this country for over 45 years. We need to alter the very core of every system that slavery, white supremacy and poverty has given birth to, particularly the criminal justice system. The United States must stop violating the human rights of men, women and children. We need to decriminalize poverty and mental illness. We must eliminate solitary confinement, torture and the use of devices of torture which have nothing to do with safe and orderly operation of prisons and everything to do with the spread of a culture of retribution, dehumanization and sadism.

We are here today to renew a commitment to the social revolution that my generation was so committed to. We are here to strategize for the building of a base of power which can only come if we forge economic independence. We all need to understand that political repression will follow if we really succeed in moving forward. The people we consider political prisoners arent being freed. They are dying inside. The phrase Free all Political Prisoners is just words on top of words, and has little merit in todays world. The late Franz Fanon taught us that each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission/fulfill it or betray it. Many years ago, I made myself a promise and chose a way of life. George Jackson, another brilliant and dead hero of many elders articulated that commitment when he said, there is no turning back from awareness. If I were to alter my step now I would always hate myself. I would grow old feeling that I had failed in my obligatory duty that is ours once we become aware.

*Note: The AFSC Prison Watch Project is seeking testimonies from men, women and children relating to the use of extended isolation and devices of torture in U.S. prisons, including all types of writing, drawings, and photos, for a new publication. The complete*

announcement appears [here](#). **The deadline has been extended through the end of the summer.**



Accurate information and authentic storytelling can serve as powerful antidotes to ignorance and injustice. We have helped generate public awareness, mainstream media attention, and informed policymaking on what was once an invisible domestic human rights crisis.

Only with your support can we continue this groundbreaking work, shining light into the darkest corners of the U.S. criminal punishment system.

by [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

Solitary Watch encourages comments and welcomes a range of ideas, opinions, debates, and respectful disagreement. We do not allow name-calling, bullying, cursing, or personal attacks of any kind. Any embedded links should be to information relevant to the conversation. Comments that violate these guidelines will be removed, and repeat offenders will be blocked. Thank you for your cooperation.

Congressional hearings began today on Muslim American radicalization.

<http://www.cnn.com/2011/POLITICS/03/10/radicalization.hearings/index.html?hpt=T2>

In my opinion this subtopic should have been given high priority:

Prisoner Radicalization: Assessing the Threat in U.S. Correctional Institutions

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/journals/261/prisoner-radicalization.htm>

The gang intelligence officers I interviewed agreed that most inmates are radicalized by other radical inmates and not by outside influences.

The research found that radicalization was based on a prison gang model.

Prison Islam which encompasses gang values and fierce intra-group loyalties based on cut-and-paste interpretations of the Quran against all the other forms of inmate Islam.

The study found that prisoners are radicalized through a process of one-on-one proselytizing by charismatic leaders. Charismatic leaders targeted the most vulnerable inmates who had spent or will spend much of their lives incarcerated under maximum security and who no longer had contact with family.

Angry and embittered by their circumstances, these inmates often adopted anti-authoritarian attitudes and were easily pressed into a gang, where they met an inmate leader who promised hope.

Indeed, I discovered that charismatic leadership was more important than other commonly cited factors associated with prisoner radicalization.

One of the veteran chaplains said, Today's inmates are more dissatisfied with the government than they were 10 years ago or even 20 years ago. The seeds of dissatisfaction are everywhere. Inmates display more aggressive posturing. They cluster on the yard by religion. Racism is rampant. They find a new religion in prison that reinforces their opposition to authority. Some of these inmates are very fertile ground for jihad.

According to FBI officials inmates are logical targets for terrorist recruitment because they may

- \* be predisposed to violence;
- \* feel disenfranchised from society;
- \* desire power and influence;
- \* seek revenge against those who incarcerated them
- \* be hostile towards authority and the U.S., or
- \* cling to a radical or extremist Islamic family.

I can't help but notice this 10 to 20 year period mentioned, (I believe it to have begun earlier in the late 60s with George Jackson), of growing dissatisfaction coincides with the increase in the use of control units in prisons and much longer sentences. Both of these factors contribute to radicalization.

So in their infinite wisdom the BOP has put these violent inmates into control units where

Scheins Man against Man: Brainwashing, techniques are practiced on them.

Schein explained his theory this way:

In order to produce marked changes of behavior and/or attitude, it is necessary to weaken, undermine or remove the supports to the old patterns of behavior and 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 those 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 aren't worthy of it and, indeed, should be actively mistrusted.

Dr. Schein has provided a list of specific examples (shorten):

Physical removal of prisoners from areas sufficiently isolated to effectively break or seriously weaken close emotional ties.

Systematic withholding of mail.

Preventing contact with anyone non-sympathetic to the method of treatment and regimen of the captive populace.

Undermining of all emotional supports.

Preventing prisoners from writing home or to friends in the community regarding the conditions of their confinement.

Building a group conviction among the prisoners that they have been abandoned by and totally isolated from their social order.

(Notice that feels disenfranchised from society is one characteristic of an inmate susceptible to being recruited into these groups which is oddly one of Schein's goals.)

The most radical ideas often grow out of a concrete intellectual engagement with the problems of aggrieved populations confronting systems of oppression.

Robin Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*.

Kelley's book studies the connections between intellectual rhetoric and social movements.

My own view is that this rhetoric can often result in terrible violence if the focus is strictly on the unjust actions of members of one group while the constructive efforts of that same group are glossed over or ignored.

Often the result of this rhetoric is the demonization of the entire people in the minds of a few, which then is used to justify violent acts against members of that group.

In the following five cases blacks felt justified in killing what each murderer called the white devils.

The Zebra Murders of the 70s carried out by the Death Angels:

<http://archive.frontpagemag.com/readArticle.aspx?ARTID=21980>

this group which believed that whites were created 3,000 years ago by a black mad scientist named Yacub who wanted a race of inferiors to rule over. Death Angels believed they could earn points towards going to heaven when they died if they killed whites. For them, whites were not human beings but grafted snakes, blue-eyed devils and white motherf---s.

The Yahweh ben Yahweh initiation murders of the 80s:

[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/09/us/09yahweh.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/09/us/09yahweh.html?_r=1)

new members were made to prove their devotion by killing a random white person, usually a vagrant. It said Yahweh ben Yahweh told members to kill me a white devil and bring me an ear.

The Black Rage defense:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_rage\\_%28law%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_rage_%28law%29)

The Long Island Railroad mass murder case 90s:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colin\\_Ferguson\\_%28mass\\_murderer%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colin_Ferguson_%28mass_murderer%29)

After his arrest:

In 1994, Ferguson was apparently involved in a fistfight with fellow inmate Joel Rifkin. The brawl began when Ferguson asked Rifkin to be quiet while Ferguson was using the telephone. The New York Daily News reported the fight escalated after Ferguson told Rifkin, I wiped out six devils (white people), and you only killed women, to which Rifkin responded, Yeah, but I had more victims. Ferguson then punched Rifkin in the mouth.

The Beltway Sniper murders 2000s:

<http://www.danielpipes.org/blog/2003/08/the-beltway-snipers-motives>

The white man is the devil, Malvo said, summing up Muhammads thinking.

Malvo said Muhammad told him, We are going to go to the Washington, D.C., area, and we are going to terrorize these people, relating how Muhammad hated America for its slavery, hypocrisy and foreign policy.

Notice that each murderer felt justified in killing random white devils totally unknown to them and it is quite possible that some victims were actually social activists.

Activists need to choose their words wisely lest they unknowingly incite another new series of murders in this decade.

In this last case mentioned in the Prisoner Radicalization article above infidels were the chosen targets.

The Sept. 11 Plot of 2005

Kevin Lamar James drifted toward a fringe group of Sunni Muslims within the correctional institution, who were known as Jamiyyat Ul-Islam Is-Saheed (the Assembly of Authentic Islam) or JIS.

James brought JISs message to new inmates at Tehachapi, preaching that it was the duty of Muslims to violently attack enemies of Islam, including the U.S. government. He eventually took control of JIS and began distributing a handwritten document called the JIS Protocol, which described his personal beliefs, including his justification for killing infidels, and required prospective members to swear obedience to him and to keep the groups existence confidential.

James plan was to attack a target symbolic of the Iraq war: a U.S. Army recruiting office. The planned date of the attack was also symbolic: four years to the day after the Sept. 11 attacks. The men began a spree of gas station robberies to fund their efforts. In one of the heists, a robber had left his cell phone at the scene, ultimately leading to the indictment of James and the three men.

The indictments led to a combined state and federal investigation of radical Islamic prison gangs in California, which found that JIS still had a presence in the states correctional system.

Although JISs goal was to die for Allah in a jihad, the members criminal skills did not match their ideological fervor.

I am not a fan of these current wars nor am I opposed to mainstream Islam.

In fact thank you Allah for the lack of skills of these men!

When thinking about these incidents over all these years it occurred to me that:

The more things change the more they remain the same.

Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr

@Ricky

Malcolm X said Youre not to be so blind with racism that you cant face reality.

Wrong is wrong, no matter who does it or says it.

( Ok ok he said patriotism not racism but he was right.) LOL

Is knowledge divisive? Here is the latest study.

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2011/mar/24/prison-rape-and-government/?pagination=false>

In 2008, it now says, more than 216,600 people were sexually abused in prisons and jails and, in the case of at least 17,100 of them, in juvenile detention. Overall, thats almost six hundred people a daytwenty-five an hour.

Overall, most victims were abused not by other inmates but agents of our government, paid with our taxes, whose job it is to keep inmates safe.

All the numbers we have cited count people who were abused, not instances of abuse. People raped behind bars cannot escape their attackers, though. They must live in constant fear, their trauma renewed every time they see their assailants. Between half and two thirds of those who claim sexual abuse in adult facilities say it happened more than once; previous BJS studies suggest that victims endure an average of three to five attacks each per year.

Here are the links to the studies I quoted with excerpts:

<http://bjc.oxfordjournals.org/content/44/2/241.full.pdf>

One theme that emerges clearly from the US literature is the racially biased nature of sexual victimization. The aggressors in Lockwoods sample were 80 per cent black, 14 per cent Hispanic and 6 per cent white; while the victims were 16 per cent black, 2 per cent Hispanic and 83 per cent white (1980: 28-9). This led him to observe that, In prison, most aggressors are black; most targets are white. Prison sexual aggression, thus, is a case study of interracial crime (ibid.: 2).

Davis (1977) found that in none of the 129 cases he examined was there a white aggressor and black victim. However these roles were reversed in 56 per cent of cases. White aggressors and white victims accounted for another 15 per cent and black aggressors and black



victims for the remaining 29 per cent. Interestingly, the proportion of aggressors roughly corresponded to the racial breakdown of the population studied, 80 per cent of whom were black. The striking difference was in the victim group, where whites were greatly over-represented. More than 30 years after Davis completed his study, Human Rights Watch (2001) indicated that little had changed and that victims remained predominantly white.

In Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson's (2000) study, the highest rate 11 per cent reporting having been raped at some stage during their time at that institution was found in a place where inmates were housed in barracks and there was racial conflict. Their data showed that 60 per cent of targets were white, while 74 per cent of perpetrators were black. Institutions where the problem was less intense tended to be more racially homogeneous. Reflecting more generally on this imbalance, Knowles (1999: 268) remarked that: This racial inequality may be the largest in any violent crime committed in the United States. As he saw it the question to be answered was: What are the social forces that drive blacks to repeatedly and exclusively rape whites? (ibid.)

Human Rights Watch published a report about this: No Escape: Male Rape in US Prisons

<http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/2001/prison/>

Inter-racial sexual abuse is common only to the extent that it involves white non-Hispanic prisoners being abused by African Americans or Hispanics. In contrast, African American and Hispanic inmates are much less frequently abused by members of other racial or ethnic groups; instead, sexual abuse tends to occur only within these groups.

Past studies have documented the prevalence of black on white sexual aggression in prison. These findings are further confirmed by Human Rights Watch's own research. Overall, our correspondence and interviews with white, black, and Hispanic inmates convince us that white inmates are disproportionately targeted for abuse.

[http://www.utexas.edu/known/2010/11/22/renaud\\_jorge/](http://www.utexas.edu/known/2010/11/22/renaud_jorge/)

In Texas prisons, violence and racism reign  
by Jorge Antonio Renaud  
Published: Nov. 22

Jorge Antonio Renaud, a graduate student in the School of Social Work, spent 27 years in Texas prisons. This post is part of a Know series on the Texas prison system.

Relieved of the certainty that random violence might result in deadly retaliation, incoming gang bangers overwhelmingly black and Hispanic brought their street codes into prison: the drive-by mentality took hold, and it was visited against Anglos. These cons didn't limit their violence to enemies they adopted the attitude that any white boy was fair game, and that he could and should be broken by continual, unexpected gang beatings administered regardless of whether he fought back, or whether he showed heart. The unwilling joined white supremacy gangs for protection, while those men weary of constant beatings became sex slaves and cash cows.

This aspect of Texas prisons results in thousands of men leaving the system with a predator mentality or a raging racism buried so deep it might never be eradicated. Reducing barriers to reentry is one thing understanding and relieving the trauma this unceasing violence leaves on the thousands of Texans returning to our streets is another.

<http://www.texasobserver.org/archives/item/13630-1014-cruel-and-unusual-still->

Justice Justice of Texas wrote in 1999:

Texas prison inmates continue to live in fear a fear that is incomprehensible to most of the states free world citizens. More vulnerable inmates are raped, beaten, owned, and sold by more powerful ones. Despite their pleas to prison officials, they are often refused protection. Instead, they pay for protection, in money, services, or sex. Correctional officers continue to rely on the physical control of excessive force to enforce order. Those inmates locked away in administrative segregation, especially those with mental illnesses, are subjected to extreme deprivations and daily psychological harm. Such practices and conditions cannot stand in our society, under our Constitution.

Here is a quote from the Supreme Court?

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Harry A. Blackmun, *Farmer v. Brennan*:

The horrors experienced by many young inmates, particularly those who are convicted of nonviolent offenses, border on the unimaginable. Prison rape not only threatens the lives of those who fall prey to their aggressors, but it is potentially devastating to the human spirit. Shame, depression, and a shattering loss of self-esteem accompany the perpetual terror the victim thereafter must endure.

This sexual violence, which is primarily focused on white inmates, is the result of an oversimplified view in the press that inmates of color are merely victims of white society.

Of course inmates of color then strike back at those who are least able to defend themselves.

In my opinion prison is a cruel gauntlet with rouge guards on one side and predatory inmates on the other. Consciously or unconsciously these two adversarial groups collude together in ways that perpetrates the violence. Non-violent inmates that just wish to serve out their sentence are held in the confined space in the middle like sacrificial lambs in a slaughter house.

Bunker wrote in *War Behind Walls*

what increases racial polarization in prison beyond conciliation is the mutative leap in black militant rhetoric. This rhetoric is heard within prison walls by unsophisticated minds and gives those blacks that already hate whites a rationale for murder. Everyone understands

that blacks have been brutalized by generations of institutional racism, and recently by inertia and indifference. What the sympathetic fail to grasp is that sometimes the psychological truncation is so great that it cannot be repaired. Nothing is left but hate. They have no desire no motivation for anything but revenge

Like Jorge I am concerned what will happen when these inmates are released.

Thank you, Alan, for sharing so much. I am worried that some of your words encourage racial division. For example the statistic Over 80% of male rape victims in prison are white and an equal percentage of the attackers are black is incredibly important to verify. Where did you get this statistic from? This does not match up to what I have heard.

But, overwhelmingly your information is very good. In the current society where people learn by video, your video examples are important. I have to read *Prisons We Choose to Live Inside* by Doris Lessing, wow. Peace.

Ok so let me give you a quick idea of just what I am talking about. Imagine your entering prison for the first time. This is your new room mates world view in the video below.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sB2\\_MmtMoIc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sB2_MmtMoIc)

How willing do you think he will be to listen to your sympathetic positions on Disproportionate Minority Contact and inequality?

And if you manage to ward off his angry advances towards you, you will find many more like him in the numerous racial based gangs that prowl the overcrowded dormitories at night. Here is a quick glimpse into the reality many face daily.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OK-tbFE-yts&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OK-tbFE-yts&feature=player_embedded)

Now in a prison like Angola where 80% of the prisoners are as angry and confused as this video portrays your new roommate to be the slightest amount of fear can be smelt by any predators. Now imagine you're a young slightly built white inmate.

What are your chances of coming out alive and with your manhood without resorting to violence? Over 80% of male rape victims in prison are white and an equal percentage of the attackers are black. The Angola 3 were said to want to stop the raping of inmates while the institution was still racially segregated. Let them also speak out against the rapes of white inmates.

Such racially inflammatory wording only encourages violence and counter violence.

Prisoners need to stop attacking each other while the guards watch on gleefully taking bets. We need to work together against an out of control system that preys overwhelmingly on the poor of all races. I would like to point out all the evils you mention that affect people of color I have also felt. In addition however I have needed to confront the anger of the majority populations in prison head on. Why should people like myself be made to pay a price any price for a system that has also victimized us? We shouldn't and the ones who should will never be placed in there in the first place. Unite and end the violence which makes all prisoners experience a living hell!

I received this book for my birthday and I think this quote sums the book up. The author notes that every generation goes through these stages where our deepest tendencies for group think, violence, and bigotry are brought to the surface. She believes we need to study this phenomena so as to avoid its negative affects. Oh and she also won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Here is the quote.

Remembering our time of total commitment to a set of dogmas that we now find pathetic, we tend to wear wry smiles. Perhaps it is not too much to say that in these violent times the kindest, wisest wish we have for the young must be: We hope that your period of immersion in group lunacy, group self-righteousness, will not coincide with some period of your country's history when you can put your murderous and stupid ideas into practice. If you are lucky, you will emerge much enlarged by your experience of what you are capable of in the way of bigotry and intolerance. You will understand absolutely how sane people, in periods of public insanity, can murder, destroy, lie, swear black is white.

*Prisons We Choose to Live Inside* by Doris Lessing.

Maybe some of you can remember her as a communist revolutionary. She became disillusioned with the party later in life.

I commend you for your long record of working for these forgotten inmates and exposing these cruel practices.

Parts of this article are insightful and extremely well delivered. Other parts should be avoided.

Although the cruel practices of the Criminal System Justice is sickening. I believe your over use of the racial imbalance of prisons is both counter productive and dangerous. Focusing on the commonality of poverty amongst inmates is a more unifying position and therefore more likely to bring about meaningful change.

As a former white inmate I can tell you that it is not the guards or their masters that bear the brunt of the anger that such an emphasis generates. This type of rhetoric results in deep racial divisions within our prisons which lead to gangs and gang violence. You mention the government's CoIntelPro and you are correct it was later found to have used unfair tactics against such groups as the Black Panthers but the program was even more successfully used against the KKK.

You quote George Jackson and it is a good quote. But Jackson also said I keep telling the brothers some of them whites would join us against the pigs. All they have to do is stop yelling HONKY!

I might add these divisive terms that I found in your article. I include Islam only as it is practiced by the Black Muslims in prison which uses many racial insults towards whites. I have personally have no problem with the religion itself unless they promote terrorism.

Islam



Islamic groups (twice)

Muslims (twice)

bodies of color

people of color (twice)

chattel slavery

sexual slavery

slaves

neo-slavery (twice)

slavery

white supremacy

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