

Updates for June 11th

26 May - Mondo we Langa: Aging in place

The following is an article about aging prisoners, following the life of Nebraska 2 political prisoner Mondo we Langa. Herman Bell has also recently started a project focusing on imprisoned elders and how to get them free.

MORE:

By Nicholas Bergin (*Lincoln Journal Star*)

David Rice walked into the Nebraska prison system a charismatic community organizer, a Black Panther radiating machismo, a belligerent writer and poet — and a 23-year-old man convicted of murder.

Forty-two years later, he needs a walker to leave his cell in the Nebraska State Penitentiary's skilled nursing facility. He breathes heavily, clear plastic tubes pumping oxygen into his nostrils to compensate for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, a legacy of a cigarette habit he gave up when tobacco was banned in state prisons eight years ago.

Now known as Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa, he is among the fastest-growing segment of inmates in federal and state prisons across the nation: the elderly.

A 2012 report released by Human Rights Watch found that from 1995 to 2010, the number of state and federal prisoners 55 or older quadrupled, growing at six times the rate of the overall prison population.

The silver tsunami is one of the results of a national shift during the past 30 years toward a more punitive, get-tough approach to crime.

Prison officials call it aging in place.

In 1990, U.S. prisons held 33,500 inmates 50 and older, about 4 percent of the total population, according to the National Institute of Corrections. By 2002, that number more than tripled to almost 113,400 and grew to include 8 percent of all state and federal inmates.

The same pattern holds true for Nebraska. In 1983, the state had 2,774 prisoners, of which only 5 percent, or 127 inmates, were ages 50 plus. In 2012, the state's prisons housed 8,211 prisoners, of which 14 percent, or 1,150 inmates, were 50 or older.

The American Civil Liberties Union estimates that by 2030, one third of the nation's inmates will be 55 and older.

Adapting to the ills of age

Prisons are built to house the young, and despite their growing numbers, old inmates remain a minority.

But faced with a burgeoning contingent of geriatric prisoners, Nebraska prison officials are working to adapt to the growing needs of people in their final years.

In general, people in prison tend to be sicker and age more quickly than those on the outside. Hard living, addiction and lack of health care take a heavy toll.

About 80 percent of inmates in Nebraska have histories of substance abuse and 30 percent are mentally ill,

according to the state Department of Correctional Services.

Physically, the bodies of older inmates show wear and tear about 10 years in advance of people on the outside, studies have shown.

With the exception of his former cigarette habit, we Langa has taken care of himself. He doesn't drink or do drugs. He exercised regularly until he fell ill. He became a vegetarian in the 1970s, and he has a mouth full of teeth.

"We have a very large dental program because of the use of methamphetamine," said Steve Urosevich, chief operating officer of Health Services for the Corrections Department. "It just destroys their teeth. We have a lot higher percentage in our population than the general population does of HIV, hepatitis C, AIDS."

The department has an annual budget of \$35 million for inmate health care, including behavioral, mental and substance abuse treatment. About \$7 million of that goes toward treatment at community hospitals and specialists. All that money comes directly from the state's coffers. In addition, Medicaid last year paid \$579,000 in hospitalization bills for qualifying inmates.

Prisons spend twice as much on older inmates as on their younger counterparts, the ACLU said in 2012: The average inmate younger than 50 cost \$34,135 annually while those older than 50 cost \$68,270. Other studies have shown medical costs for older prisoners to be three to nine times greater than for younger inmates.

Urosevich did not have a breakdown of costs in Nebraska but said trips for treatment at outside facilities cost double for older inmates — \$8,000 versus \$4,000 — and older inmates are more likely to need them.

There are exceptions: The annual cost of treatment for one 21-year-old Nebraska inmate with a rare form of hemophilia is \$700,000. The man, who Urosevich said he could not identify, is serving 90 to 100 years.

Saving money with prevention

The cliché that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure quickly is becoming the Nebraska prison system's motto.

"Plus, I think just the moral and ethical thing to do is to try to help someone be healthy," Urosevich said.

In 2012, guards began evaluating inmates 45 and older upon admission using a test developed by the departments of Gerontology and Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

The assessment looks at things as simple as whether a person can eat without help, needs a cane, remembers words, can use the toilet.

The Corrections Department also started in-house programs recently for chemotherapy and dialysis — in high demand because drug use can lead to kidney failure. On-site treatment is cheaper and reduces security risks inherent in taking inmates out for treatment.

And the department just completed a pilot program teaching preventive care to inmates with chronic illnesses at the Nebraska State Penitentiary. Urosevich called it a resounding success and said it eventually will be rolled out at all of the state's prisons.

The final release

After more than four decades behind bars and a serious health scare, we Langa still hopes to die a free man.

Last fall, the possibility he would die in a prison cell seemed almost certain. He spent weeks bedridden and stopped breathing three times.

“As far as I’m concerned, it was life or death,” he said in a March 14 interview at the penitentiary. “I don’t know, and apparently they (medical staff) don’t know what triggered me having these incidents.”

We Langa and Ed Poindexter were convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to life for the Aug. 17, 1970, bombing death of Omaha Police Officer Larry Minard. They are the state’s seventh- and eighth-longest-serving inmates.

The two consider themselves political prisoners singled out by the FBI and Douglas County officials for their leadership roles in the National Committee to Combat Fascism, an offshoot of the Black Panthers. Poindexter was head of the committee, we Langa its deputy minister of information. They allege authorities planted evidence, coerced witnesses and withheld the recording of the 911 call that lured eight officers to a North Omaha house. Minard died after a booby-trapped briefcase packed with dynamite exploded.

Omaha Sen. Ernie Chambers, who helped facilitate we Langa’s surrender to police, considers their convictions “a gross miscarriage of justice” and said authorities feared loaded mouths more than they feared loaded guns.

"I brought Mondo in because I didn't want anything to happen to him," Chambers said recently. "... They felt Ed and David were like the head of a beast and if you killed the head, the body died. So they couldn't kill them literally because generally they were around other people. So the next best thing was to let the system take care of them, and they locked them away."

Amnesty International has taken up the case, and political activists including Angela Davis and actor Danny Glover have spoken on their behalf. All appeals and requests for commutation have been rejected.

When they come up for parole in January, supporters plan to add a new twist — a request for compassionate release because neither man poses a threat to society, said Mary Dickinson, vice president of Nebraskans for Justice.

Statistically, the argument bears out. Arrest rates for serious crimes drop precipitously by age 50, according to studies by the U.S. Department of Justice.

But the argument has failed in the past. Jerry Hansen, 77, the state’s longest-serving prisoner, has been eligible for parole since 1977. He is serving two sentences of 20 years to life for killing his wife’s parents, Howard and Gertrude Soderling, at their Cedar Bluffs home Jan. 22, 1965, plus 20 years for shooting his wife, Sandra, who survived.

Hansen was described as a model prisoner until 1973, when he was taken to speak at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting as part of an exchange program. He was allowed to stop to see his ex-wife, and while there, he tied up his guard and shot Sandra Hansen several times. She was paralyzed; he picked up another one to 20 years.

In 2009, Hansen filed a civil petition saying he was in ill health and “no threat to society whatsoever.” He asked the judge to intervene with the state Board of Parole and argued that public policy when he was sentenced recognized inmate reformation and rewarded it with parole but that now, the board “requires a maximum service of imprisonment in retaliation.”

Lancaster County District Judge Karen Flowers dismissed the suit, saying it is up to the board to decide what is best.

And not everyone thinks compassion is appropriate.

“That is what life in prison means,” said one of Larry Minard’s children, Larry Jr., who was 9 when his father died.

A helping hand

Hearing loss, bad vision and dementia — typical ailments of the elderly — can cause friction in prison, and guards generally don't approach their jobs with the mind-set of nursing home aides, said UNO Gerontology Professor Julie Masters.

"It may not be, 'I'm being obstinate,'" she said. "It may just be, 'I didn't hear the command.' If I have cognitive issues like dementia and Alzheimer's disease, I might have a pretty tough time finding my cell."

Some need help with the simplest acts such as dressing, bathing, eating.

Enter the porter program.

"We wanted to offer the inmate health porter program so that inmates can help us care for the increasing patient load we're experiencing because we're not authorized any more staff," Urosevich said.

Officials in charge of the program use psychological testing and interviews to filter out applicants who may have predatory natures, he said. Starting pay is 38 cents per hour and can go as high as \$1.08.

"Which is good pay for an inmate," Urosevich said.

Joleet Poole sees the porter program as a chance to practice Christian values in prison.

"I took this job because, being a Christian, I believe in the Bible," he said. "The Bible says that anyone who wants to be a leader must first learn to be a servant.

"It's just like any other job. Some days you leave with a really fulfilled feeling and other days you leave wondering, 'What have I gotten myself into?'"

The hard part, he said, is watching them die.

Poole, who works with almost a dozen men including we Langa, has one criticism of the program: Even at the end of their lives, he said, inmates are treated as prisoners first and patients second.

We Langa lives in the penitentiary's skilled nursing facility but eats lunch each day with the general population.

On his way to the chow hall, as many as 30 guys will stop to wish him well, give him a fist bump.

Poole said we Langa transcends generations. He's respected by young and old, prisoners and guards.

"The entire time he is eating, the poor guy's food ends up getting cold because so many people are well-wishing him," Poole said.

"I have been in here 42 years, and I haven't so much as had a fight," we Langa said. "I had to tell a person one time, 'I'm almost 65. And I've gotten to this age partially because I give people their respect. You're not 30 yet, and you've lived as long as you have out of pure luck.'"

He has written multiple books and countless articles, and before he got sick, he played guitar, wrote a prison newsletter and gave history lectures to fellow inmates.

Housing

Nebraska prisons have skilled nursing areas at Tecumseh State Correctional Institution, the penitentiary and Diagnostic and Evaluation Center in Lincoln, plus a mental health unit with 70 beds for men with major mental

illness and severe impairments including advanced dementia and Alzheimer's.

The skilled nursing areas hold a total of 31 beds and have become the prison system's de facto nursing homes for inmates too sick to be in general population but not sick enough for full-time hospital care.

No female inmates have health problems severe enough to need advanced care right now, but it's only a matter of time, Urosevich said. When they do, he said, they'll have to be sent to outside facilities.

He would like to see medical services consolidated into a single facility with space for old and young alike, and he hopes a planned study of housing needs will address the issue of aging inmates. The study is required by law to look at alternatives before the department can seek funding to build a new prison to address overcrowding. As of March, state prisons were about 1,400 inmates above capacity.

Chambers, who firmly opposes building new ones, said society's dehumanization of prisoners makes them easy to ignore.

"Since you don't care anymore to look at this person as a human being, there is no concern about what happens to him or her once the door closes and they are behind bars," he said. "So it is extremely difficult to get the Legislature to look at programming, to consider the likelihood that practically everybody who is put in prison is going to come out.

"In many cases it turns into a death watch just waiting for them to kick the bucket. Then you dispose of their corpse and another one bites the dust."

A 2008 proposal by Omaha Sen. Brad Ashford to create a task force to study the graying prison population died in committee.

Gov. Dave Heineman's spokeswoman Jen Rae Hein said the governor is aware of the issue but she declined to comment further, other than to say that the governor, as a member of the state Board of Pardons, doesn't prejudge cases.

When death means freedom

Noel Heathman knows he will die in prison.

The 66-year-old known as Nose speaks in a barely audible rasp punctuated by the sound of breath whistling through a hole in his neck. He has emphysema and is a throat cancer survivor.

It took years for the Tecumseh inmate to come to the conclusion he would die behind a concrete wall.

When an Omaha judge sentenced him to life in prison 33 years ago for kidnapping and raping a 19-year-old Omaha woman, he considered it his duty to escape.

Heathman said he feels bad about what he did and wishes it had never happened. Loaded on meth and booze, he said, he snapped.

Four years after he was sentenced, Heathman became the first inmate since 1951 — and the last — to go over the penitentiary's wall.

Heathman and inmate Roger Weikle fashioned a grappling hook, and in broad daylight Sept. 9, 1984, scaled the prison wall bordering U.S. 77 just south of Nebraska 2. Weikle's leg snapped when he dropped from the 30-foot wall to the ground and he soon found himself back in a cell.

Heathman hid near the prison until 2 in the morning, brushed leaves and mud from his clothing and walked to a

hotel across the street for a pack of smokes and a pop.

"I looked like the wrath of God," he said in a 1985 interview.

Heathman spent three months on the run, stopping in Spencer, Iowa, to have dinner with his parents and then going to Kansas City, Arizona, Wisconsin and California. The law finally caught up with him in Santa Cruz, Calif.

After being recaptured, Heathman vowed to escape again. He thought his chance finally had come when he went to Oregon as part of a prisoner exchange.

"That was my goal, to escape out of Oregon," he said during an interview in 2010. "I figured out a way of doing it, too. ... I was thinking on it and discussing it with a few brothers and then — I got sick."

Throat cancer led to a permanent tracheotomy, and Oregon traded him back to Nebraska. He nearly died in 2009 when a drug-resistant staph infection started in the trachea and spread down his back.

That was before the health porter program, but Heathman said fellow inmates and caseworkers in his housing unit offered what help they could while he was recovering, cleaning his cell or carrying groceries for him from the prison commissary.

He doesn't even think about escape anymore.

"I'm too old for that," he said during a recent interview. "There is no light at the end of my tunnel ... I'll die at home (in a cell.) You got to accept it."

Twelve inmates died in Nebraska prisons last year: Two were suicides, 10 died of natural causes, Urosevich said. When they reach the end, the state offers hospice from a cell with the help of AseraCare.

"They (inmates) have committed a crime. They have had some bad judgments. But they're still human beings," Urosevich said.

As part of hospice, prison officials allow family members to visit. But for Heathman, when the time comes, the men on his cell block likely will be his only visitors. His parents are dead. His sister and daughter don't speak to him.

Heathman said his few belongings will go to a close friend. When he escapes prison for the last time, he wants his ashes scattered in the Rocky Mountains at Evergreen, Colo.

"It's beautiful there."

28 May - Judge Orders State to Hand Over Info on Police Spying on the NATO 3, Not the Broader Chicago Activist Community

We're including an update on the NATO 3 case below. They have a trial scheduled to start in early September and had a court appearance earlier today.

MORE:

The NATO 3—Brent Betterly, Brian Jacob Church, and Jared Chase—were brought before Judge Thaddeus Wilson again today for another status hearing leading up to their trial in September. The defendants looked well and were not shackled at the hands, only at the feet. There were also fewer sheriff's deputies in the viewing gallery intimidating supporters.

As the September 19th trial date looms closer and closer, we must pack the courtroom gallery to let our

comrades know we stand with them as they face this state repression. These status hearings have uncovered previously unknown information about the broad and sweeping surveillance program carried out by the Chicago Police Department against the activist community. They have also revealed the nature of the legal fight the NATO 3 are facing. Their lawyers continue to work hard on their defense and support funds are still urgently needed to help them prepare for trial. You can make a tax-deductible donation today by sending a check or money order with “8th Day Center/Nato 5 Defense Fund” in the memo line to:

8th Day Center for Justice
205 West Monroe Street, Suite 500
Chicago, Illinois 60606

You can also donate online at <https://www.wepay.com/donations/nato-5-defense> (these donations are not tax-deductible).

The judge has attempted to maintain a strict schedule, holding status hearings every two weeks to monitor the progress of outstanding discovery issues. The prosecutors have dragged out the discovery process past two set deadlines by withholding key information needed by the defense team. This information largely has to do with the extensive surveillance program of the Chicago Police Department and their months of spying on activists as well as their collaboration with federal police agencies.

In the last hearing, the judge ordered the prosecution to comply with a handful of discovery requests made by the defense. The main issue of contention was how much the broad surveillance investigation into Occupy Chicago, the Mental Health Movement, Chicago Street Medics, and other activist groups would be given up by the prosecutors and the Chicago Police Department as part of the trial. While the judge ruled that a majority of the discovery motions were irrelevant to the specific case of the NATO 3, he did order the state to comply with a number of discovery requests, including the following:

- the 1st Amendment worksheet produced by the field intelligence team in the course of the investigation and all subsequent re-applications
- text messages exchanged between different officers involved in the investigation
- Affidavits from the three police informants as well as additional officers within the Field Intelligence Team regarding the specific investigation of the three defendants, but not the larger investigation into Occupy Chicago
- The identification of officers involved in taking pictures during surveillance operations
- Any additional information on training programs undergone by the police informants

Today, the prosecution had not secured this discovery material, wasting more time to cover up the repressive state surveillance behind the targeting of the NATO 3. Matthew Thrun, Assistant State Attorney, claimed to have scheduled a meeting this Thursday with the 15 officers involved in the Field Intelligence Unit behind the clandestine spying and targeting operation carried out by the Chicago Police Department against activists. Thrun told Judge Wilson that they will have information on the deleted text messages and surveillance pictures after this meeting. The plan agreed upon by the prosecution and the defense is for the prosecution to be in compliance with the discovery orders in 2 weeks.

Two attorneys within the defense team then previewed motions to dismiss that will be filed by the next hearing. Michael Deutsch with the National Lawyers Guild, who is defending Brian Jacob Church, alluded to a pretrial motion to dismiss the arson charges, arguing that the facts of the indictment do not fulfill the statute. Attorneys for Brent Betterly alluded to their own pretrial motion to be filed by the next hearing to dismiss a variety of charges against him based on grand jury testimony.

Finally, the judge asked the prosecutors to what extent they had thus far received information from federal law enforcement agencies. In previous status hearings, the defense team requested discovery material from other agencies such as the National Security Agency (NSA), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the Secret Service. The defense presented evidence of previous communications between these agencies through fusion centers on Occupy movement activities. The prosecutors stated that they had not received any information

from the requests they submitted and the judge encouraged them to meet the scheduled deadlines.

28 May - New writing by Mumia Abu-Jamal

Below, we've pasted the transcripts of Mumia's latest audio commentaries, ranging from rape culture to tornados to Guantanamo.

MORE:

May 28th - Rape Culture

The events arising out of Cleveland, Ohio, are so shocking, so unexpected that they cause us to pause – and to question.

How well do I know my neighbors?

How well do I know anyone?

We don't, of course. We see one's comings and goings, but Americans don't really like meddling or mingling much.

In earlier times, men said: 'A man's home is his castle!' This principle reigned for decades.

(I suppose now, some will say, 'a man's home is his dungeon!' huh?--) But, I digress.

Cleveland isn't as far from us as we'd like to admit. For a quiet scandal is simmering on the nation's stove, that may even make Cleveland look almost normal.

I speak of the tens of thousands of cases, most of which go unreported, of women in the military who are raped by fellow soldiers, airmen, marines – and their officers.

Perhaps few such attacks are more of a betrayal (possibly that of a father of a daughter), but here, where young women enter with the illusion of camaraderie, they are betrayed by their so-called brothers-in-uniform- and then turned on by officers who resent their reporting such attacks!

We live in a rape culture. We live where the lives and even the bodies of women are mere material to be used, and discarded.

Who can deny that this country was born on the freedom of white men to rape African and Indian women on a whim?

Indeed, for centuries it wasn't a crime!

Why should it surprise us that it is so deep in American male culture?

Donald Matthews, a Black clergyman and author of the book, *Honoring the Ancestors*, coined the term rapitalistic to reflect the twin forces of rape and capitalism to expose the American drive to conquer and exploit all that is touched.

Land. Women. Nonwhites. Nature.

From Cleveland to Iraq isn't so far after all.

June 4th - Nature's War

Tornadoes – two miles wide.

Whipping – whipping –ripping – breaking – lives, wood, brick, steel, hearts and families asunder.

Buildings as big as malls, shredded like children's toys.

Cars, trees, children – my God –children! – tossed through the air like leaves.

And while man didn't create these primal, natural forces, modern, industrial life with its myriad of pollutants has made it no better – and has indeed, exacerbated it.

So, bigger, fiercer storms are our lot; nature unleashed like an angry goddess – ripping – whipping – tearing and breaking.

Whirlpools of wind before which few can dare stand.

Meanwhile politicians debate whether climate change is real or not; while parents bury their children.

This time; Moore, Oklahoma.

More to come.

June 6th - GUANTANAMO: Fear & Hunger

The word Guantanamo has become a watchword for the world.

It is a temple of stated terror, of Imperial fear and American hypocrisy.

Since 2002, it has been transformed from a US Naval Base on Cuban soil (against the wishes of the Cuban government, it must be said), to a global torture chamber and an interrogation center.

Opened under Bush/Cheney and maintained under Obama, it has been a detention center designed for perpetual detention – to hundreds of men – and boys.

An international outcry forced the government to release over 500 men back to half a dozen countries.

Today, 166 men remain languishing there – with dozens on a hunger strike – an act of sheer desperation after a decade in Guantanamo without charges.

Eighty-six men have been cleared for release but remain in chains – years later.

President Barack Obama campaigned on Guantanamo's promised closure, but 5 years later, and it remains. In the last few months the Obama administration began seizing family letters and photos – the only connection to their loved ones as they can't receive family visitors.

In desperation, dozens of men have launched the hunger strike – a desperate measure for a desperate situation.

The government's response? To lower cell temperatures – and to force-feed them – by stuffing a filthy tube down their throats to fill aching stomachs.

Thus, they are torturing men by force-feeding them, so that they can live in the torture of indefinite detention.

America boasts to the world of its human rights – and its "values" – but the world can't hear them over the cries and moans of the Guantanamo detainees.

Demand that Guantanamo be closed immediately.

Free the Guantanamo detainees and return them to their home countries.

29 May - Oscar López Rivera's 32 Years of Resistance to Torture

May 29, marks 32 years since Puerto Rican activist Oscar López Rivera was arrested and later convicted of “seditious conspiracy,” a questionable charge that Archbishop Desmond Tutu has interpreted to mean “conspiring to free his people from the shackles of imperial injustice.”

MORE:

By Hans Bennett for *Upside Down World*

Today, 70-year-old Oscar López Rivera, never accused of hurting anyone, remains in a cell at FCI Terre Haute, in Indiana. Supporters around the world continue to seek his release, most recently by asking US President Barack Obama for a commutation of his sentence. Similar pardons granted by President Truman in 1952, President Carter in 1979, and President Clinton in 1999, were the legal bases for the release of many other Puerto Rican political prisoners.

Since all of Oscar López Rivera's original co-defendants have already won their release, he is famous in Puerto Rico as the longest held Independentista political prisoner. Supporters are planning a range of events across the island for the upcoming week, as they mark this dubious ‘anniversary.’ Among those calling for his release is Javier Jiménez Pérez, the mayor of his hometown of San Sebastián, Puerto Rico, and a supporter of statehood.

Upside Down World interviewed Dylcia Pagán, one of López Rivera's co-defendants pardoned in 1999, by telephone from her home in Loíza, Puerto Rico, where she continues to work in support of other political prisoners. Asked why the US government should release López Rivera now, after 32 years, Pagán told Upside Down World:

“Oscar should be free because he is an incredible human being, an artist, and a man that has a lot to give society in both the US and Puerto Rico. He has never even been accused of committing an act of violence. This conviction for ‘seditious conspiracy’ is what they’ve used against all of the Independentistas. The US claims to believe in democracy and human rights, but Oscar’s continued imprisonment is a clear violation of both.”

Pagán adds: “Oscar has served his time with dignity and has contributed to the lives of other prisoners. He deserves to be home in Puerto Rico, just like all of us.”

Between Torture and Resistance

“i was born Boricua, i will keep being Boricua, and will die a Boricua. i refuse to accept injustice, and will never ignore it when i become aware of it.” –Oscar López Rivera, 2011

With public support continuing to build for Oscar López Rivera's release, PM Press has just published an important book, entitled *Between Torture and Resistance*, timed well to amplify López Rivera's voice at this critical time. The book bases its text upon letters López Rivera has written over the years to lawyer and activist Luis Nieves Falcón, as well as letters to and from many family members during his imprisonment. This new book examines the broader political significance of López Rivera's case, while providing an unflinching look at how imprisonment and draconian policies like solitary confinement and no-contact visits affect prisoners and their loved ones.

Perhaps nothing illustrates López Rivera's character better than how he refers to himself with the lowercase use of the letter ‘i,’ in order to deemphasize the individual with respect to the collective. His letters offer a view into the mind of an extraordinary person. Reading first-hand in *Between Torture and Resistance* about the range of abuses that López Rivera has survived while in US custody may cause readers nightmares, but his accounts are a badly-needed reality check for anyone unfamiliar with the typically brutal treatment of US political prisoners. As Reverend Ángel L. Rivera-Agosto, executive secretary of the Puerto Rico Council of Churches comments, the

book “is a powerful testimony, born from the cold bars of imprisonment, as a sign of today’s injustice and lack of freedom and respect for human rights.”

The chapter entitled “Life Experiences: 1943-1976,” offers a glimpse into the early years of Oscar López Rivera, born on January 6, 1943, in Barrio Aibonito of San Sebastián, Puerto Rico. At the age of fourteen, he moved with his family to the US and eventually graduated from high school in Chicago in 1960. In a 1981 interview, López Rivera’s mother, Mita described this initial move, reflecting: “My husband came looking for a better environment and it was not to be found here. We have to work harder, it’s colder, [there is] more humiliation, more racism for us...We live humiliated by the Americans...We suffer in this country.”

After working several different jobs to help support his family, in 1965 the government drafted López Rivera into the Vietnam War, which ultimately “awakened previously unexperienced feelings about Puerto Rico. First, the Puerto Rican flag became a symbol of important unity among the Puerto Rican soldiers...Second, Oscar began to question his role in such a terrible war. Why did they have to kill people who had done nothing to them? Why kill people who appeared to have things in common with Puerto Ricans themselves? He began to question the actions of North American imperialism in that Southeast Asian country, and the role of Puerto Ricans in the imperialist wars of the United States. These two seeds—cultural nationalism and anti-colonial struggle—begin to germinate in Oscar’s mind in Vietnam, and ripened later in his life,” writes Luis Nieves Falcón.

López Rivera’s politicization continued after serving in Vietnam, when he returned to Chicago. After working with the Saul Alinsky-influenced Northwest Community Organization, in 1972, he co-founded the Pedro Albizu Campos High School, an alternative school controlled directly by Puerto Ricans. Nieves Falcón writes that here “Oscar articulated a powerful vision of how alternative schools can challenge the essentially racist system of mainstream US education.”

In 1973, he co-founded Juan Antonio Corretjer Puerto Rican Cultural Center and in 1975 helped establish Illinois’ first Latino Cultural Center. López Rivera participated in some of the Young Lords’ activities, but he was not a member of the group. In addition, he worked on other issues, including racial discrimination in hiring and working conditions, confronting landlords about housing conditions, and improving hospital conditions and medical services for the most vulnerable. Luis Nieves Falcón comments that Lopez Rivera’s “civil activism between 1969 and 1976 clearly evidenced his genuine and significant effort to use every possible route of change within Chicago’s existing official structures.”

In 1973, after joining the National Hispanic Commission of the Episcopal Church, López Rivera publicly supported Independentistas imprisoned in the US for attacks on the Blair House (the Presidential guesthouse) in 1950 and on the US Congress in 1954. In the early 1970s, several armed clandestine groups formed in Puerto Rico and carried out actions to protest the US occupation of Puerto Rico. At this time, the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN) formed inside the US and from 1974-1980 claimed responsibility for multiple bombings, mostly in New York and Chicago, of military, government and economic targets. The FALN said they meant for their actions to publicize US colonization of Puerto Rico and to demand the release of the same imprisoned Independentistas that Oscar López Rivera and other community activists had been publicly supporting.

In response, the US government held Grand Jury investigations, ‘fishing’ for intelligence on the FALN, in 1974 and from 1976-1977. The government jailed several members of the National Hispanic Commission of the Episcopal Church for refusing to cooperate with the Grand Jury, including López Rivera’s brother, Jose. With Oscar López Rivera expecting to be the Grand Jury’s next target, he and three other close associates went underground, where López Rivera remained from 1976 until his subsequent arrest in 1981.

Convicted of ‘Seditious Conspiracy’

“This is not a trial. It is not even a kangaroo court.” –Oscar López Rivera, speaking at the 1981 court

proceedings.

Oscar López Rivera's legal team at the People's Law Office, explains on their website:

"In 1980, eleven men and women were arrested and later charged with the overtly political charge of seditious conspiracy — conspiring to oppose U.S. authority over Puerto Rico by force, by membership in the FALN, and of related charges of weapons possession and transporting stolen cars across state lines. Oscar was not arrested at the time, but he was named as a codefendant in the indictment...In 1981, Oscar was arrested after a traffic stop, tried for the identical seditious conspiracy charge, convicted, and sentenced by the same judge to a prison term of 55 years. In 1987 he received a consecutive 15 year term for conspiracy to escape—a plot conceived and carried out by government agents and informants/provocateurs, resulting in a total sentence of 70 years."

At Oscar López Rivera's 1981 trial, he took a position similar to that of his co-defendants at their earlier trial: he declared the trial illegitimate and refused to present a defense or pursue an appeal. However, López Rivera did make an eloquent statement, reprinted in *Between Torture and Resistance*:

"Given my revolutionary principles, the legacy of our heroic freedom fighters, and my respect for international law—the only law which has a right to judge my actions—it is my obligation and my duty to declare myself a prisoner of war. I therefore do not recognize the jurisdiction of the United States government over Puerto Rico or of this court to try me or judge me."

Later, at his 1987 trial where the court convicted him of "conspiracy to escape," López Rivera took a similar stance, and in his statement, also reprinted in the new book, he elaborated further on the precedent set by anti-colonialist international law:

"Colonialism, dear members of the jury, is a monumental injustice according to the norms of civilized humanity and a crime under international law. According to United Nations Resolution 2621, the continuation of colonialism in all its forms and manifestations is a crime that constitutes a violation of the charter of the United Nations, Resolution 1514 (XV), the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples...No nation, ladies and gentleman, has the right to take over another nation. The military invasion and occupation of Puerto Rico clearly depicts the rapacious and voracious nature of the United States government, with the armed forces, rifles, and cannons it used to subjugate a people into submission and reduce a nation of one million inhabitants to a commodity for the bartering of human beings. For 89 years, this nation, conquered by force—the Puerto Rican people—have been denied their basic rights to self-determination and independence."

'Spiritcide' and the Torture of Imprisonment

"The memory of our pain deserves to be appreciated, remembered, and never denied." --Oscar López Rivera, 1997

Following his 1981 conviction, the government first held López Rivera at FCI Leavenworth in Kansas, until 1986. Upon arrival, Luis Nieves Falcón writes that "the majority of the prison guards were waiting for him. They surrounded him and verbally assaulted him. They repeatedly stressed that they didn't want him there; that he was a dangerous terrorist and the place for him was Marion: an even higher-security prison, regarded among prison guards as the right place to eliminate terrorists." Despite a clean record at Leavenworth and a 1985 report by his jailers that "he demonstrated favorable adjustment and maintained positive relations with the staff," López Rivera became the target of an FBI entrapment scheme, involving a fabricated escape plan. On June 24, 1986, just days after the government formally accused him of planning to escape, he received a disciplinary transfer to the notorious federal prison in Marion, Illinois.

During the court proceedings for the 'escape' charges, held from September 1986 to February 1988, prison authorities held López Rivera in solitary confinement at MCC Chicago. Following his conviction and sentence of

15 years, authorities transferred him back to Marion, where he stayed until 1994. The new book features his reflections upon his living conditions during this period. López Rivera writes:

“i use the word ‘spiritcide’ to describe the dehumanizing and pernicious existence that i have suffered...i face, on the one hand, an environment that is a sensory deprivation laboratory, and on the other hand, a regimen replete with obstacles to deny, destroy or paralyze my creativity...i am locked up in a cell that is 6’ wide and 9’long, for an average of 22 ½ hours a day...Living in these conditions day after day and year after year has to have an adverse effect on my senses. i don’t have access to fresh air or to natural light because when i turn off the light in the cell to sleep, the guards keep the outside lights on and light enters the cell...Day and night i hear the roaring of the electric fans, whose noise is so strident that when I don’t hear them, i feel disoriented.”

Later in the same letter, López Rivera explains how he has survived:

“i know that the human spirit has the capacity to resurrect after suffering spiritcide. And like the rose or the wilted leaf falls and dies and in its place a newer and stronger one is reborn or resurrects, my spirit will also resurrect if the jailers achieve their goals...My certainty lies in my confidence that i have chosen to serve a just and noble cause. A free, just, and democratic homeland represents a sublime ideal worth fighting for...i am in this dungeon and the possibility that i will be freed is remote, not to say impossible, under conditions equal to or worse than caged animals, under spiritual and physical attack, but with full dignity and with a clean and clear conscience.”

In 1994, authorities transferred López Rivera to a new federal prison in Florence, Colorado that soon became as notorious as Marion was, for its own human rights abuses. After over a year of good behavior at Florence, authorities transferred him back to Marion after denying his request to be transferred elsewhere. Even though Marion had officially become lower security than before, following his transfer back, López Rivera reported that conditions had become worse.

Perhaps most chilling is his account of getting an operation for a hemorrhoid condition three days after his mother had passed away. Authorities had denied his request to attend the funeral. Within hours of the procedure, the area operated upon became infected, with his fever finally reaching 102.7 degrees. At this point, instead of giving him antibiotics as he immediately requested from the medical staff, authorities accused him of stealing the needle used for a blood test. The authorities cruelly withheld the antibiotics. Two days later, as the still untreated infection got even worse,

“They released me from the hospital and returned me to the hole. The jailers that took me were racing wheel chairs. Every turn made me feel as if someone was cutting me with a razor. i got to the cell and was preparing to clean up the blood. A lieutenant came in and said they were going to cuff me...According to him i had stolen the needle and immediately passed it to an accomplice who took it away...They searched me from head to toe. Blood was running down my legs, and here he was passing a metal detector on my rear. To punish me, they did not allow me to use the sitz bath or give me medications.”

It was not until 10:00 pm, the following day, López Rivera writes “that they gave me the sitz bath and the antibiotics...An hour later, my body responded and I was able to use the toilet—an incredibly painful ordeal”

In 1998, after 12 years in total isolation, authorities transferred López Rivera to FCI Terre Haute, in Indiana, where he remains today. Once there, he was finally able to have contact visits and other new ‘privileges,’ which increased his quality of life. Despite these improvements, the People’s Law Office reports that prison authorities imposed a special condition requiring him to report his whereabouts every two hours to prison guards. Even though this condition was initially scheduled to end after 18 months, it still continues today, over 14 years later.

Since 1999, authorities have barred the media from interviewing López Rivera, “in spite of policy allowing for media interviews of prisoners, in spite of allowing media interviews of other prisoners, and in spite of having allowed Oscar to be interviewed many times previously, without incident. Each rejection has used the identical,

unsubstantiated excuse that ‘the interview could jeopardize security and disturb the orderly running of the institution,’” writes the People’s Law Office, noting further that “since 2011, the government has extended this ban beyond media, rejecting requests by New York elected officials to meet with Oscar.”

The Struggle Continues

“They will never be able to break my spirit or my will. Every day i wake up alive is a blessing.” –Oscar López Rivera, 2006

In 2011, the denial of parole to Oscar López Rivera outraged the leaders of Puerto Rico’s political and civil society, who publicly denounced the ruling. One critic, Puerto Rico’s non-voting U.S. congressional representative, Pedro Pierluisi, said, “I don’t see how they can justify another 12 years of prison after he has spent practically 30 years in prison, and the others who were charged with the same conduct are already in the free community. It seems to me to be excessive punishment.”

In response to the parole denial, 1984 Nobel Peace Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu joined Nobel Laureates Máiread Corrigan Maguire of Northern Ireland and Adolfo Pérez Esquivel of Argentina, to send a letter to US President Barack Obama expressing their concern about his parole hearing. The letter cited how “testimony was permitted at that hearing regarding crimes López Rivera was never accused of committing in the first place, and a decision was handed down which—in denying parole—pronounced a veritable death sentence by suggesting that no appeal for release be heard again until 2023.”

Following the parole denial, López Rivera declared in a public statement to supporters:

“We have not achieved the desired goal. But we achieved something more beautiful, more precious and more important. And that is the fact that the campaign included people who represent a rainbow of political ideologies, religious beliefs, and social classes that exist in Puerto Rico. This to me represents the magnanimity of the Boricua heart—one filled with love, compassion, courage and hope.”

Today, López Rivera and his support campaign are focusing their efforts on a letter-writing campaign asking US President Barack Obama to pardon him ([view/download a suggested letter](#)). There is a strong precedent for this strategy. In 1952, President Harry Truman commuted the death sentence of Oscar Collazo. In 1977 and 1979, President Jimmy Carter pardoned Andrés Figueroa Cordero, Rafael Cancel Miranda, Lolita Lebrón, Irving Flores and Oscar Collazo.

In 1999, President Bill Clinton pardoned Oscar López Rivera’s co-defendants Edwin Cortés, Elizam Escobar, Ricardo Jiménez, Adolfo Matos, Dylcia Pagán, Luis Rosa, Alberto Rodríguez, Alicia Rodríguez, Ida Luz Rodríguez, Alejandrina Torres, Carmen Valentín, and Juan Segarra Palmer. President Clinton offered to release López Rivera on the condition that he serve ten more years in prison. However, because Clinton did not extend that offer to two other Independentista prisoners, López Rivera did not accept the offer. In 2009 and 2010, those two other prisoners won their release on parole, making López Rivera the last co-defendant still imprisoned today, even though Clinton’s offer would have ostensibly released him in 2009.

Dylcia Pagán, pardoned in 1999, says that after 32 years of imprisonment, the time is now for President Barack Obama to pardon Oscar López Rivera. Asked to compare today’s political climate to that in 1999, Pagán is optimistic and says the movement is “alive and well,” with popular pressure continuing to build in support of López Rivera. “Hopefully, Oscar will be home by Christmas.

The new book, *Between Torture and Resistance*, concludes with a final thought from Luis Nieves Falcón:

“The best tribute we can extend to Oscar is to continue to fight every day, with yet greater determination, for his release. Every day that Oscar remains in prison is another reminder of the hypocrisy and absurdity of the US government’s talk of human rights in light of its colonial rule. In the strongest possible terms, let us raise our

voices to denounce this abuse and demand freedom for Oscar López Rivera."

2 Jun - Call the Warden for Tom Manning

We recently received word from our comrade Tom Manning that the prison officials at Butner Medical Center have been stalling on allowing the doctors to perform a shoulder replacement, supposedly because of his age and the fact that he has been suffering lightheadedness and has fallen a few times. The simple fact of the matter is with a rotor cup replacement he would be able to hold on to a walker that would give him stability, lessening the likelihood for him to fall again.

MORE:

Please *CALL OR FAX* the warden at Butner Federal Medical Facility Phone: **919.575.3900** Fax: **919.575.4801** asking that Tom Manning be given a shoulder replacement and the necessary physical therapy to enable him to walk again.

Tom Manning has been imprisoned 28 years. He is currently serving a 53 year federal sentence for a series of bombings carried out by the United Freedom Front in the 1980's. The bombings targeted properties of the U.S. military and corporations because of their complicity in waging wars in Central America and collaboration with apartheid South Africa.

After completing his current sentence Tom must begin a life sentence in New Jersey for felony murder of a state trooper. Although acquitted of intentional murder, Tom was convicted for leaving the scene following a shootout between the trooper and Tom's comrade Richard Williams. (Think: Assata Shakur) Richard died in prison following a long period of medical neglect by the Federal Bureau of Prisons. We do not want this to happen to Tom.

In April, 2010 the Bureau of Prisons ignored a deadly infection in Tom's knee until an outside doctor intervened and Tom was hospitalized. He spent the next 5 weeks chained to a bed as bone and infection were removed from his knee. After the operation he couldn't walk. Three years later and he still can't walk.

In November, 2010 Tom was sent to the Federal (prison) Medical Center at Butner, North Carolina for knee replacement surgery. He received the surgery 20 months later yet he still cannot walk because he's not received the necessary physical therapy, and because a severely damaged shoulder prevents him from using a walker and crutches.

Although an outside doctor highly recommended shoulder replacement surgery, a "committee" of BOP bureaucrats recently denied the doctor's recommendation. Tom must have shoulder surgery and physical therapy if he's to have any chance at walking again. Presently he remains in a wheelchair and held in a Butner isolation unit where he's been for the past 30 months.

Write to Tom and send him words of love and support:

Thomas Manning #10373-016
FMC Butner
Post Office Box 1600
Butner, North Carolina 27509

3 Jun - Announcing Inside/Out, a book club with anarchist prisoners

Combustion Books are pleased to announce our newest anarchist prisoner support program, inside/out. Every month, a collective member of Combustion Books will choose a different fiction book with radical themes (from any publisher). Inside (prisoner) book club members will receive a free copy of the book. Outside (supporting) book club members can get the book any way they would like.

MORE:

We encourage people to buy the book from us or to donate \$3-5 to us to alleviate the costs of sending free books

to prisoners.

Supporting book club members can email us their letters and responses to the book, which we will print and pass along to all the prisoner book club members. Prisoner book club members can send us letters, which we will scan and pass along to all supporting book club members. Responses are due the first of the next month.

We are running this project for two reasons. First, we simply want to give books to prisoners. Second, we hope to give those who would support anarchist prisoners a point of common interest, to give them something to talk about.

The June 2013 book is *The Windup Girl* by Paulo Bacigalupi.

to sign up, go ahead and purchase the book of the month from us, or write us at insideout@combustionbooks.org. Prisoners can be registered by friends by email or by writing us a letter at

Combustion Books
Post Office Box 721338
Jackson Heights, New York 11372

The project's page is:
<http://www.combustionbooks.org/insideout>

and the book of the month can be purchased from us here:
<http://www.combustionbooks.org/products-page/fiction/insideout-book-of-the-month>

4 Jun - Gerald Koch Hasn't Been Accused of a Crime, but the Feds Put Him in Jail Anyway

Here's a new article written about grand jury resister Jerry Koch by Will Potter for VICE.

MORE:

A New York anarchist has been jailed for refusing to testify before a federal grand jury about his political beliefs, his friends, and the legal support he provided to Occupy Wall Street.

Gerald "Jerry" Koch, 24, was subpoenaed before a grand jury that is believed to be investigating the 2008 explosion outside a military recruitment center in Times Square. The blast damaged only the front door of the center and injured no one, but the FBI began a "terrorism" investigation of local anarchists.

Koch isn't accused of this crime—or any other crime. Prosecutors told his lawyers that they think he was at a bar in 2008 or 2009, after the bombing, and that someone else at the bar knew about another person who was involved. Koch was subpoenaed to a grand jury in 2009—when he was only 19—and publicly stated that he didn't know anything about it and wouldn't cooperate.

On May 21, he appeared before the grand jury again, refused to answer any questions, and remained silent the entire time. More than a hundred supporters yelled out to him as he was taken to jail.

"By the time you read this," Koch said in a statement released after the hearing, "I will be in the custody of the United States government for continuing my refusal to cooperate with a federal grand jury. This is the right thing to do."

If the government's six-degrees-of-separation logic and bar-talk investigation of Koch sounds sketchy, it should: grand juries have been used for decades as pretext for gathering information not necessarily about crimes but about the actions of social movements, including the Black Panthers, environmentalists, and antiwar activists.

Grand juries are secretive by nature. Prosecutors won't even acknowledge if a grand jury exists, let alone say

what is being investigated. When you appear before a grand jury, you don't have the right for your attorney to be present. Nor can you assert your First Amendment and Fifth Amendment rights and refuse to talk about your politics, your friends, or yourself. If you do, you can be held in contempt and thrown in jail until you cooperate. They can keep you there as long as 18 months.

Grand juries are intended as a safeguard of sorts within the court system. They're meant to determine if the government has enough evidence to move forward with a prosecution. But all of that secrecy and unchecked power lends itself quite well to political fishing expeditions, and that's what is happening in Koch's case.

"Jerry was the person everyone could count on to be waiting for them outside of jail, to support them in the courtroom, and to help with their legal defense," his supporters said in a statement. "It is clear that the state's goal is not just to pressure Jerry into informing on the radical community, but to take away someone who is an integral part of our community—someone who makes us all stronger."

Koch's imprisonment is the most recent case in a growing crackdown on anarchists and other radicals, and signals an increased use of grand juries against them.

Last year, six anarchists in the Pacific Northwest were subpoenaed to a grand jury investigating vandalism during a May Day protest in Seattle.

Matt Duran and Katherine "KteeO" Olejnik are two of the anarchists who refused to cooperate and were imprisoned. They both spent five months in jail. Two months were spent in solitary confinement, treatment that the Seattle Human Rights Commission called inhumane. Eventually US District Judge Richard A. Jones released them, saying that "their resolve appears to increase as their confinement continues."

Their resolve was only possible, the resisters say, because of the support they received from anarchists and civil rights advocates around the world. "It can't be said enough how important prisoner support is," Olejnik says. "It's what keeps people strong on the inside. It's what kept me strong. One letter can make all the difference... They are trying to break you."

Koch, who has years of experience providing legal aid to activists, is now on the receiving end of prisoner support efforts.

His partner, Amanda Clarke, recalls the 12-hour days Koch would spend at courthouses, on the phone, and in the streets helping those arrested at Occupy Wall Street protests. In one case, a group of activists were facing multiple felonies and Koch raised thousands of dollars in donations in just a few hours for their release.

"It's really scary, seeing the government go after one of your friends in this way," she says. The grand jury and Koch's imprisonment have instilled fear in radical communities in New York, but she says it has been overshadowed by support and outrage from new allies.

"I overheard someone on the subway talking about Jerry and saying, 'How can this be the law in our country?'" she says. "That's exactly it. How can you put someone in prison who is not even charged with anything?"

4 Jun - Solidarity And Liberation by Walter Bond

Animal Liberation Front prisoner Walter bond has a new piece titled "Solidarity and Liberation" that we've included below.

MORE:

From behind fences and razor wire, from behind concrete walls and steel bars, from deep within the United States Penitentiary of Marion, from the CMU unit, from this counter-terrorism prison unit for political prisoners, I send revolutionary greetings to all Straight Edge, Vegan and Anarchist Comrades where ever you may be. From the confines of this dungeon of gray concrete I send a message of solidarity and hope to all the sisters and

brothers worldwide, in hopes that all our causes for liberation will one day coalesce into the realization of Total Liberation. Just as the rivers all lead to the ocean, so too will the movements for Human, Earth and Animal Liberation pool into a far larger initiative.

Today's world is one of apathy and lethargy; that is to say, we live in a society that breeds defeatism and wants us to feel disempowered by bureaucracy, consumerism and disinformation., while simultaneously distracting us with the bread and circus of media, entertainment, addictions and neurosis. Many are the people that sabotage their own efforts at activism with negativity, over-sensitivity and fear. The problem is not one of 'the activist mentality' as much as it is a problem of legislation over Liberation.

In other words, you don't attain true freedom from tyranny and injustice on behalf of yourself or others by begging those institutions that are the cause of injustice and oppression. And we don't advance the cause of Liberation by picking each other apart. Being ready to blackball and character assassinate those that have trivial differences in theoretics or ideology is divisive. The true bane of our existences are the state, government, prison, police and corporations that kill, enslave and corrupt.

Entirely too much time and energy is spent in our movements disagreeing with each other over minutia and tactics. The world is neither black nor white -- it's black and white and every shade in between. And just as oppression and slavery are hydra-headed and multi-formed so then are our approaches at combating them. Everyone doesn't have to agree or follow the same path to activism, but everyone must do something other than preaching to the choir or bickering over the internet like impish little tyrants. Because your outlets fail you when they are pointed internally instead of externally.

The worship of aesthetic over action is disgusting and petty! By action I mean real world work. By aesthetic, I mean all the pomp, posturing and fashion facade we deem important when they are absolutely not.

In Animal Rights we hear of book authors and food producers as being 'heroes for the Animals.' Really? How about the women all over the world that spend every penny they have taking Animals into their care, sacrificing of themselves at every turn to make one more critter's life safe and secure? You don't hear too much about them at the conventions, but I can assure you they are numerous and they are doing more for Animals than a thousand podium pushers!

What about the people of 'food not bombs' that feed the homeless vegan and vegetarian meals all over the Earth at the risk of being arrested? These are my heroes, the people that have their feet firmly on the ground and work for a positive change in this world.

Principles over personalities must take precedence over the cults of personality. If you work or fight against racism, sexism and gender inequality, if you work or fight for gay rights, animal rights, trans empowerment, prison abolition, Earth Liberation, anarchism, and equality for all that live (and I mean work or fight for it, not make a ton of money bilking the public with bullshit charities), then you should be proud to do such work!

It's an honor to sacrifice on behalf of those who are abused, downtrodden and exploited. IT'S AN HONOR!

No one should be put on a pedestal -- not me, not you, not anyone. What we are a part of is special. What we fight for is heroic. The struggle towards Total Liberation is amazing, NOT the individuals involved.

Individuals can be jailed, killed or fickle to the point of abandoning the cause when the going gets tough, but the movement for Total Liberation cannot be stopped. Even when co-opted and sold out, it enters the stream of consciousness and infects the masses that sit on their asses, little by little.

Liberation is not a game. It's not a worldview or a school of thought.

Liberation is about life and the quality of it. It's about lifting that invisible weight of oppression that you have

been saddled with since birth off your chest, so that you can help lift the shackles off of the rest of the world.

Liberation is about courage and lion heartedness. It's the defiance that looks at authority and doesn't just abhor it but resists it.

Liberation is when you would rather be dead than in bondage.

Liberation is when another's exploitation and oppression becomes as unacceptable as your own.

And Liberation is going to win!

I don't have faith in god, and I don't have faith in human goodness, but I have faith that the struggles for Earth, Animals and Anarchy will come to fruition. I see their progress in all spheres of life, and I feel that no matter how tyrannical state or corporate authority becomes, that truly collective freedom is simply too irresistible and dynamic to ever be smashed by their regimes!

Whether any of us living will witness these radical changes, in total, and in our lifetimes, is irrelevant to the fact that having been party to these struggles lives on after us.

6 Jun - As Manning Trial Begins, Press Predictably Misses the Point

Well, the Bradley Manning trial has begun, and for the most part, the government couldn't have scripted the headlines any better.

MORE:

By MATT TAIBI (Rolling Stone)

In the now-defunct Starz series Boss, there's a reporter character named "Sam Miller" played by actor Troy Garity who complains about lazy reporters who just blindly eat whatever storylines are fed to them by people in power. He called those sorts of stories Chumpbait. If the story is too easy, if you're doing a piece on a sensitive topic and factoids are not only reaching you freely, but publishing them is somehow not meeting much opposition from people up on high, then you're probably eating Chumpbait.

There's an obvious Chumpbait angle in the Bradley Manning story, and most of the mainstream press reports went with it. You can usually tell if you're running a Chumpbait piece if you find yourself writing the same article as 10,000 other hacks.

The Trials of Bradley Manning

The CNN headline read as follows: "Hero or Traitor? Bradley Manning's Trial to Start Monday." NBC went with "Contrasting Portraits of Bradley Manning as Court-Martial Opens." Time magazine's Denver Nicks took this original approach in their "think" piece on Manning, "Bradley Manning and our Real Secrecy Problem":

Is he a traitor or a hero? This is the question surrounding Bradley Manning, the army private currently being court-martialed at Fort Meade for aiding the enemy by wrongfully causing defense information to be published on the Internet.

The Nicks thesis turned out to be one chosen by a lot of editorialists at the Manning trial, who have decided that the "real story" in the Manning case is what this incident showed about our lax security procedures, our lax of good due diligence vetting the folks we put in charge of our vital information.

"With so many poorly protected secrets accessible to so many people, it was only a matter of time," Nicks wrote. "We can be grateful that Bradley Manning rather than someone less charitably inclined perpetrated this leak."

Dr. Tim Johnson of the Telegraph took a similar approach, only he was even less generous than Nicks, calling

Manning the "weirdo [who] tried to bring down the government," a man who was "guilty as hell" and "deserves to do time."

"Private Manning was a self-absorbed geek who should never have enjoyed the level of access that he did," Johnson wrote. He went on to argue that Manning's obvious personality defects should have disqualified him for sensitive duty, and the fact that he was even hired in the first place is the real scandal of this trial:

His personality breakdown was there for all to see – criticising US policy on Facebook, telling friends, "Bradley Manning is not a piece of equipment", and even entertaining "a very internal private struggle with his gender". He told hacker Adrian Lamo that he "listened and lip-synced to Lady Gaga's Telephone while exfiltrating possibly the largest data spillage in American history." You go, girl.

All of this shit is disgraceful. It's Chumpbait.

If I was working for the Pentagon's PR department as a hired press Svengali, with my salary eating up some of the nearly five billion dollars the armed services spends annually on advertising and public relations, I would be telling my team to pump reporters over and over again with the same angle.

I would beat it into the head of every hack on this beat that the court-martial is about a troubled young man with gender identity problems, that the key issue of law here rests inside the mind of young PFC Manning, that the only important issue of fact for both a jury and the American people to decide is exactly the question in these headlines.

Is Manning a hero, or a traitor? Did he give thousands of files to Wikileaks out of a sense of justice and moral horror, or did he do it because he had interpersonal problems, because he couldn't keep his job, because he was a woman trapped in a man's body, because he was a fame-seeker, because he was lonely?

You get the press and the rest of America following that bouncing ball, and the game's over. Almost no matter what the outcome of the trial is, if you can convince the American people that this case is about mental state of a single troubled kid from Crescent, Oklahoma, then the propaganda war has been won already.

Because in reality, this case does not have anything to do with who Bradley Manning is, or even, really, what his motives were. This case is entirely about the "classified" materials Manning had access to, and whether or not they contained widespread evidence of war crimes.

This whole thing, this trial, it all comes down to one simple equation. If you can be punished for making public a crime, then the government doing the punishing is itself criminal.

Manning, by whatever means, stumbled into a massive archive of evidence of state-sponsored murder and torture, and for whatever reason, he released it. The debate we should be having is over whether as a people we approve of the acts he uncovered that were being done in our names.

Slate was one of the few outlets to approach the Manning trial in a way that made sense. Their story took the opportunity of the court-martial to remind all of us of the list of horrors Manning discovered, including (just to name a very few):

During the Iraq War, U.S. authorities failed to investigate hundreds of reports of abuse, torture, rape, and murder by Iraqi police and soldiers, according to thousands of field reports... There were 109,032 "violent deaths" recorded in Iraq between 2004 and 2009, including 66,081 civilians. Leaked records from the Afghan War separately revealed coalition troops' alleged role in killing at least 195 civilians in unreported incidents, one reportedly involving U.S. service members machine-gunning a bus, wounding or killing 15 passengers... In Baghdad in 2007, a U.S. Army helicopter gunned down a group of civilians, including two Reuters news staff...

This last incident was the notorious video in which our helicopter pilots lit up a group of civilians, among other

things wounding two children in a van, to which the pilots blithely commented, "Well, it's their fault for bringing their kids into a battle."

Except that there had been no battle, none of the people on the street were armed, it was an attack from space for all these people knew – and oh, by the way, we were in their country, thanks to a war that history has revealed to have been a grotesque policy error.

It's their fault for bringing their kids into a battle. It's lines like this, truly horrific stuff that's evidence of a kind of sociopathic breakdown of our society, that this trial should be about. Not Manning's personal life.

Unfortunately, the American people would rather make it about Manning, because they know they were complicit in those and other murders, because they loudly brayed for war in Iraq for years, no matter how often and how loudly it was explained to them that Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden were not the same person.

Hacks like Johnson reassure the public that they have the right to have the results of their own moral decisions kept well hidden from them. His kind of propaganda soothes people into believing that Manning was just a freak and a weirdo, a one-off kink in the machinery, who hopefully will be thrown in the hole forever or at least for a very long time, so that we don't have to hear about any of this awful stuff again. At the very least, according to Johnson, we shouldn't have to listen to anyone call Manning a hero:

At the centre of the storm is a person who one suspects should never have been in uniform, let alone enjoying access to military intelligence, who has blundered into the history books by way of a personality crisis. Incredibly, some people actually want to celebrate him as a gay icon. Who next, the Kray twins?

Wow. We're the ones machine-gunning children, and yet Manning is the one being compared to the murdering Kray twins? And Jesus, isn't being charged with the Espionage Act enough? Is Manning also being accused of not representing gay America skillfully enough on the dock?

Here's my question to Johnson: What would be the correct kind of person to have access to videos of civilian massacres? Who's the right kind of person to be let in the know about the fact that we systematically turned academics and other "suspects" over to the Iraqi military to be tortured? We want people who will, what, sit on this stuff? Apparently the idea is to hire the kind of person who will cheerfully help us keep this sort of thing hidden from ourselves.

The thing is, when it comes to things like the infamous "Collateral Murder" video, whether it's Bradley Manning or anyone else, any decent human being would have had an obligation to come forward. Presented with that material, you either become part of a campaign of torture and murder by saying nothing, or you have to make it public. Morally, there's no option.

Yes, Manning went beyond even that. One can definitely quibble about the volume of the material he released and the manner in which he released it. And I get that military secrets should, in a properly functioning society, be kept secret.

But when military secrets cross the line into atrocities, the act of keeping these secrets secret ceases to have much meaning.

The issues to be debated at this trial are massive in scope. They're about the character of the society we've all created, not the state of mind of one troubled Army private. If anyone tries to tell you anything else, he's selling you something.

12 Jun – Call-in for Oso Blanco

WHAT: Call-in against medical neglect

WHEN: 9:00am-5:00pm, Mountain Time, Wednesday, June 12th

WHERE: Your Phone

MORE:

On the heels of the June 11th international day of solidarity with Marie Mason, Eric McDavid, and other longterm anarchist prisoners . . .

June 12 – June 13, 9am- 5pm, Mountain Time

Call USP Florence-High in Solidarity with Byron Chubbuck a.k.a Oso Blanco!!!
Help a Captive Indigenous Warrior Survive! Fight Medical Neglect in u.s. Prisons!
CALL: 719.784.9454

People to ask for and speak with if they are available . . .

- Mr. Charles Daniels, Warden
- Ms. McDermott, Hospital Administrator
- Mr. Leggit, Counselor
- Miss Hopkins
- “The Lieutenant”

NOTE: Any of these people may put you on hold indefinitely, hang up on you, talk over you, etc. If nothing else, let someone, even if it’s just the operator, know the reason you are calling.

Sample call talking points . . .

Hello, may I speak to _____? This call is in reference to inmate Byron Chubbuck #07909-051. Byron has a painful, potentially cancerous mass in his liver. He needs an ultrasound to determine the problem, and has been asking for this since he came to Florence in January.

He placed a sick call in April.

He has high ammonia build up in his liver and experiences daily vomiting, diarrhea, dizziness, drowsiness, and irregular breathing.

Byron already has a medical record in the BOP concerning liver problems and has never asked for family/friends to help with a medical condition before.

I know that HIPAA prevents you from sharing his personal health information (PHI) with me– I just want to make sure this is brought to your attention and that you take all actions necessary to ensure Mr. Chubbuck proper medical treatment.

I know you have a protocol to follow. Why wasn’t he given a liver biopsy when he placed a sick call in April? How do you evaluate an internal medical condition?

Thank you for doing the right thing and getting my friend the medical attention he needs.

Coordinating the effort

Post a brief report of how your call went to social media with this announcement or a link to it! Lead by example! #OsoBlanco

Email denverabc@riseup.net and let us know how calls are going!

If you can, send a quick get card to Oso, letting him know that you called and that he is in your thoughts

and/or prayers. This will lift Oso's spirits and again remind him, as well as his captors, that he is not alone in his struggles.