

October 7, 1988

Committee to End the Marion Lockdown
343 S. Dearborn, Suite 1607
Chicago, IL 60604

Dear Steve Whitman & other friends,

Our art show out at Alcatraz Island opened up on October 1st. We wanted to thank you for all your help and all the information you have compiled which was so useful for us, and to let you know how the piece finally turned out.

The most exciting thing is that we "shot for the moon" and asked both Morton Sobell and Leonard Peltier to help us with our art piece, and they both graciously agreed. Our piece is called "Marion: the New Alcatraz", and it exposes the injustices of maximum security detention, then and now. It is an installation which simulates non-contact prison visits with Morton Sobell and Leonard Peltier. Visitors enter a darkened room and can sit down in front of a steely metal wall with two plexiglass windows in it. In front of each window are telephones through which one can hear, on the one side, a taped message from Morton, and on the other side, a taped message from Leonard. Transcripts of the taped messages are provided as well. Through the windows one views a slide projection of an aerial view of Marion (the one from the slide show). Other artifacts like a stack of old bunks from the cells at Alcatraz and graffiti from the Indian occupation at Alcatraz can also be seen through the window. Periodically, a traditional Sioux song of flute and chanting begins to play into the room.

On the day of the opening, we were deeply honored to be joined by some A.I.M. people and other activists, including Lauren from the local Lexington Campaign. A ceremony was held to bless our art piece and to ask that it help to bring understanding to those who see it. The traditional sage and sweetgrass were burned, and an eagle feather was passed as we prayed for all who are unjustly imprisoned, for the earth and the animals, and for all who are fighting for their liberation around the world. A friend sang a Leonard Peltier honor song.

We have gotten a tremendous amount of support for our work every step of the way, and now that the show has opened, we have spoken to many people who want to understand more about U.S. prisons, political prisoners and the struggle of Native Americans. We hope to do a showing of the video on Marion and Lexington, and perhaps the slide show as well, some time soon.

We have, unfortunately, run into some difficulties with one of the supervisors from the National Park Service who already censored our artists' statement without telling us and who now wants us to remove our "for further info" phone number from Leonard and Morton's transcripts. She was particularly upset that the outgoing message on our answering machine mentions specific groups through which further information can be obtained, i.e. the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown and the Leonard Peltier Defense Committee, and she is claiming that the Bureau of Prisons is also upset about it. After consulting with some other friends, we have decided to simply defy her request. We intend to gather whatever names and addresses people leave on our machine and pass them on to you, and we will give your address and phone number to whoever wants them. It seems pretty clear at this point that any further attempts to silence our exposure of the government will backfire on them and help our side.

Again, thank you for all your help and good work. With a lot of people like you and a little bit of good luck, maybe we can keep them from consolidating their police-state plans.

Yours in the struggle,

Jo Babcock Catherine Costello

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MARION: THE NEW ALCATRAZ

Marion penitentiary in Illinois is presently the maximum security federal prison in the United States, just as Alcatraz was until 1963. [Marion has the dubious distinction of being the first institution in the U.S. to be investigated and condemned by Amnesty International for human rights abuses.]

Our installation will simulate non-contact visits with Morton Sobell, a former inmate at Alcatraz, and Leonard Peltier, a former inmate at Marion. Peltier is currently incarcerated at Leavenworth.

JO BABCOCK

CATHERINE COSTELLO

*Please note that the National Park Service
"edited out" our sentence about Amnesty International's
investigation of Marion!*