

We feel that if our movement is to grow even stronger we must recognize that the US war at home is a war no less serious than the one being waged in the Persian Gulf. The Black Liberation Movement has frequently raised the slogan:

"NO JUSTICE, NO PEACE!"

We cannot hope to have a peaceful society until we have a just society. And we cannot have a just society while we have a racist society. For this reason, opposition to racism in our society must

become an integral element on the agenda of the Peace Movement.

We in the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown think that the problem of racism is central, and we are trying to do something about it. If you are interested in what we do and what we have to say, write us for our resource list and more information about our work. In addition to many publications, we also have a fine collection of videos about prisons and racism and would be happy to make these available to you and your friends.

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NO RACIST WAR! NO RACIST PRISONS! NO RACIST SOCIETY!

We in the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown have watched with much sorrow and anger as the United States has waged war in the Middle East but also with optimism as the anti-war movement has responded with great energy and determination. We believe the war in the Gulf is taking place in the context of racism in our society, and that by understanding this context we can better understand the war and how to stop it.

For seven years our committee has been working to end the notorious brutality of the United States Penitentiary at Marion, located in southern Illinois. Marion, the prison that replaced Alcatraz, is for dissidents—those hated by the US government. It is the worst, most inhuman prison in the US. In the course of our work we have learned that Marion cannot be understood without placing it in the context of the US prison system. And, as with the Gulf war, the prison system can best be understood in the context of racism in the US.

About 75% of the prisoners at Marion are people of color. This is not surprising since a Black person in the US is about eight times more likely to go to prison than a white person. Amazingly, Black people in the US are almost four times more likely to go to prison than Black

people in South Africa. In fact, one out of every four Black men are under the control of the "criminal" "justice" system. Dostoevsky was correct, we believe, when he wrote that to understand a society, you should look into its prisons. As these imprisonment statistics indicate, the US is a profoundly racist society. The facts of the matter outside the walls are equally visible (see box next page):



- White families have ten times the median family wealth as Black families;
- 50% of Black children live in poverty;
- 40% of those on Death Row are Black;
- The vast majority of those brutalized and murdered by the police are Black. Here in Chicago there are documented cases of police torture of Black men;
- The Black infant mortality rate is twice the white rate;
- The Black maternal mortality rate is three times the white rate;
- The death rate from AIDS in East Harlem is eight times higher than it is in a corresponding community in Queens, NY. Although Black people comprise only 12% of the US population, they account for 30% of the cases of AIDS;
- 80% of children of color in the US have not been adequately vaccinated. Interestingly, it has been reported that *all the children of the world* could be vaccinated for 1.25 billion dollars, just about the cost of one day of the US war in the Gulf;
- Black people live, on the average, seven years less than white people. The life expectancy for white people continues to increase but the life expectancy for Black people has been decreasing for the last four years.

The situation in the Black community is at the level of war, literally:

- The annual number of "excess deaths" among Black people (the number of Blacks who would not have died each year had they experienced the same mortality rates as white people) is 60,000. This means that the Black community loses more people *in one year alone* than the US lost during the nine years of the Viet Nam War.
- In 1987, more young Black men were killed in the US than had been killed in the Viet Nam War. In that year Black men were about 7 times more likely than white men to die of "homicide and legal intervention."

One could go on forever with such a list. The point is that racism in this country is not just bad—it too is a war, a war against Black people. Sometimes even those in power admit this. Last year, a front page story in the Los Angeles Times (4/22/90) stated that the "war on drugs has become a war on Black people," while noting that 80% of the drug users in the US are white but the vast majority of people going to prison for drug use are Black. It is interesting that many Black people seem to perceive things just this way. A recent

survey reported in the New York Times (10/29/90) revealed that many Black people think there is a government conspiracy to wipe them out.

It is in this context that many Black people have begun to use the word "genocide" to describe what is being done to them: it was used by people surveyed by the Times article mentioned above; it was used by the Urban League in last year's "Annual Report on the State of Black America"; and it was used by

Cecil Williams, a prominent Black minister from San Francisco, who wrote in the "op-ed" pages of the New York Times:

"What I'm talking about is genocide, 1990s style: when the spirit of a people is destroyed, when the culture of people is destroyed, when basic human relationships are ripped apart, when large numbers of people are killed because of drug-related crimes and overdoses. I am talking about the spiritual and physical death of a race."

This oppression of people of color by the US is perpetrated for the sake of the wealthy elite, the corporate bosses. Black people constitute a force of such significant proportions that were they to be fully activated to demand their human rights, rights to decent education, employment, housing, health care, etc., it would severely challenge the power of the ruling elite. Why else was the rising demand for human rights in the 60's dubbed a "crisis of democracy" by the government? Thus it is seen to be necessary to maintain control over people of color, perpetuating poverty, imprisoning and harassing large sectors of their communities.

The same force is at work in the Gulf. In the interests of the owners of the oil companies and weapons producers, George Bush is waging war on a nation of color, continuing a US tradition since World War II (Korea, Viet Nam, Grenada, El Salvador, Panama). But there is a greater goal than mere oil profits. The US is indeed intent on setting up a "New World Order," one in which the US can openly and with impunity maintain control, by force if necessary, over all the

primary resources of the Third World. Again racism is central. At the heart is a belief that the US has the *right* to plunder and exploit nations of color, that the raw materials and human labor of Third World countries are there solely for the benefit of US business. Any attempt by the populations of these countries to gain control over their own lives is seen by the US as "internal aggression" and is to be brutally suppressed either by direct intervention (as in Viet Nam) or by funding murderous clients (as in Nicaragua).

The manner in which racism facilitates the brutality of the Gulf war is all around us. It is responsible for the degrading and even demonizing portrayals of Arab people, which in turn facilitates the US destruction of thousands, possibly even hundreds of thousands, of Iraqi lives. When bombs with millions of pounds of explosives fall on Iraq, it is just fine; when a Scud missile lands in Israel and one man dies of a heart attack, it is front page news. Israel has been condemned 42 times for violating the U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights, yet the US still opposes the rights of the Palestinian people to their homeland. Clearly racism facilitates such inhuman practices.

A final irony is that 37% of the US soldiers in the Gulf are people of color, just about twice their proportion of the US population. It has been an economic draft: lack of education and employment opportunities leave people of color with few alternatives. This has resulted in the phenomenon of "BLACK PEOPLE KILLING BROWN PEOPLE FOR WHITE PEOPLE."