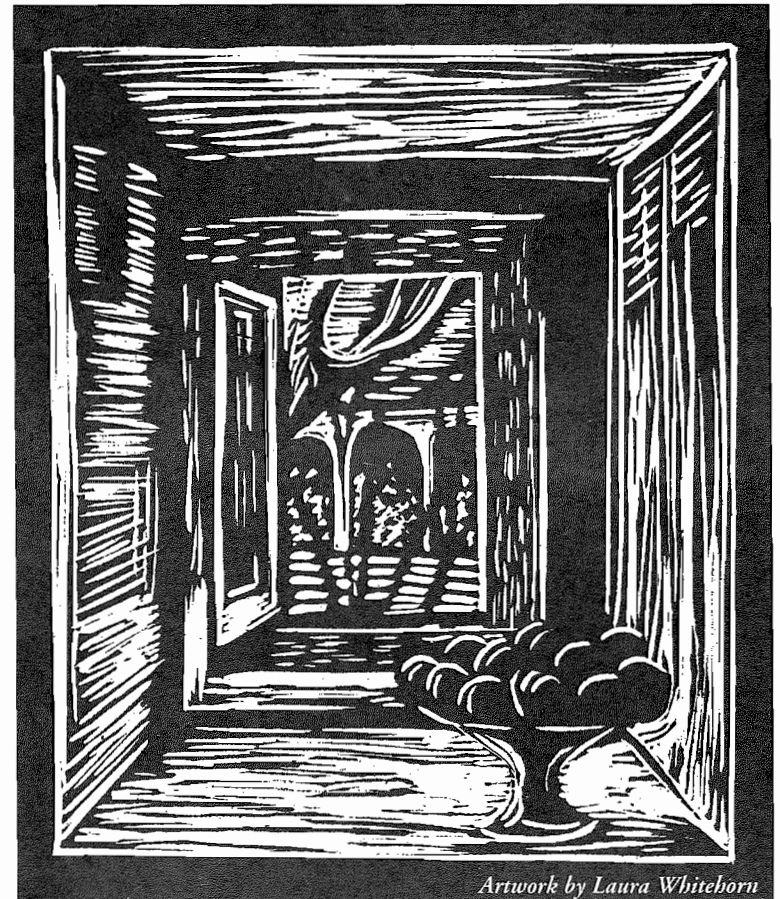


SPARKS FLY

**Women Political Prisoners *and*
Prisoners of War in the U.S.**



Artwork by Laura Whitehorn

Biographies ★ Writings ★ Art

Sparks Fly

Women Political Prisoners and
Prisoners of War in the U.S.

Edited by Out of Control:
Lesbian Committee to Support
Women Political Prisoners
and Prisoners of War
& the Young Sisters

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Thirteen Springs

had you planted a tree
to fill in the deep well
of my absence
that tree would be
thirteen springs high
high enough to relieve
the relentless sun of incarceration
strong enough to bear
the weight of children
who might have been born
had I not been seized
from your life and plunged
into this acid-washed crypt
of perpetual loss
and high-wired vigilance

but there is no tree
that stands in my place
to harbor birds and changing winds
perhaps someone will plant
a willow a eucalyptus
or even a redwood
any tree that will
in thirteen years more
bear fruit and provide shelter

Marilyn Buck / August 1997

Introduction

As long as there has been struggle and resistance, there have been women warriors. The middle ages had its witch hunts, and those who survived it by going deep underground. The industrial revolution had its debtor's prisons and workhouses, and those who lived thru it were a great force in the so called settling of north america. All the wars perpetrated by the conquistadors of the world have had the above ground as well as underground women resistance fighters. Union struggles of the early 1900s and today, the civil rights, students rights, anti-war, and lesbian/gay liberation movements of the 60s & 70s had women resistance fighters.

There are many levels of political oppression in the u.s.. One could make the argument that all Native people are political prisoners based on the history of genocide against them; or that all African Americans are political prisoners based on the history of slavery; or that all working & poor people are political prisoners looking at the history of absolute economical injustice in the u.s., or that all women are political prisoners given the heavy handed herstory of sexism; after all a woman is raped every 3 minutes in the u.s. today (we have included a calif. battered woman case to draw attention to this issue). But for our purposes here, we will use the definition that these women were consciously committing acts based on their social and/or political consciousness at the time or that they have been radically or progressively politicized inside the prisons. Please note that we do not consider right wing terrorist, hate mongers, racists, or homophobics to be our allies.

We honor all women's resistance by dedicating this publication to Lolita Lebrón, Assata Shakur, Merle Africa, Judi Bari and Anna Mae Aquash. The courage and commitment of these women serves as an encouragement for all of us. Their lives are fine examples of what is possible.

This booklet highlights women political prisoners and Prisoners of War in the u.s. at the end of the twentieth century. We are sure that we do not know everything about everyone, and apologize for any oversights. There is a resource list and a bibliography included for your further study.

**ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE
FREE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS**



Lolita Lebrón

On March 4, 1954, Lolita Lebrón led Irvin Flores, Rafael Cancel Miranda and Andrés Figueroa Cordero in an attack on Congress. They fired shots into the House of Representatives, unfurled a Puerto Rican flag, and proclaimed "Que Viva Puerto Rico Libre!" This action was in response to intensifying colonial attacks on the independent movement, especially the imposition of Commonwealth status. In the midst of a U.S. campaign to prove to the world that Puerto Rico was no longer a U.S. colony, the Nationalists' actions shouted out that there was an active and militant independence movement on the island and in the U.S.

Lolita was born in the town of Lares, where the first proclamation of Puerto Rican nationhood was made in 1868. In a statement from prison Lolita explains some of her earliest understanding of the destructive impact of U.S. colonialism:

"As a little girl, I went to school and learned to place my hand over my heart and pledge allegiance to the U.S. My classmates were very pale and sickly looking children, mostly all barefoot and in rags with swollen stomachs, skinny bodies and were nervous and uneasy. One day I heard myself saying, if I could make a better world, I would make it—a world where hard-working oppressed people would be free."

"At 21 and amidst a very difficult life of suffering, I was advised to do as other poor women of my country were doing—to sail to New York where there would be more opportunities. My life in New York grew to a greater understanding of human oppression, exploitation and negation. I had to deny I was Puerto Rican in order to get a job."

Lolita was sentenced to life imprisonment without parole for the action against the U.S. Congress. She served 25 years in prison, many of them spent in solitary confinement and with severe physical and psychological harassment and torture. Her commitment to the struggle to free her nation helped to keep her strong and militant during her years in prison. She actively supported progressive struggles inside prison and participated in a



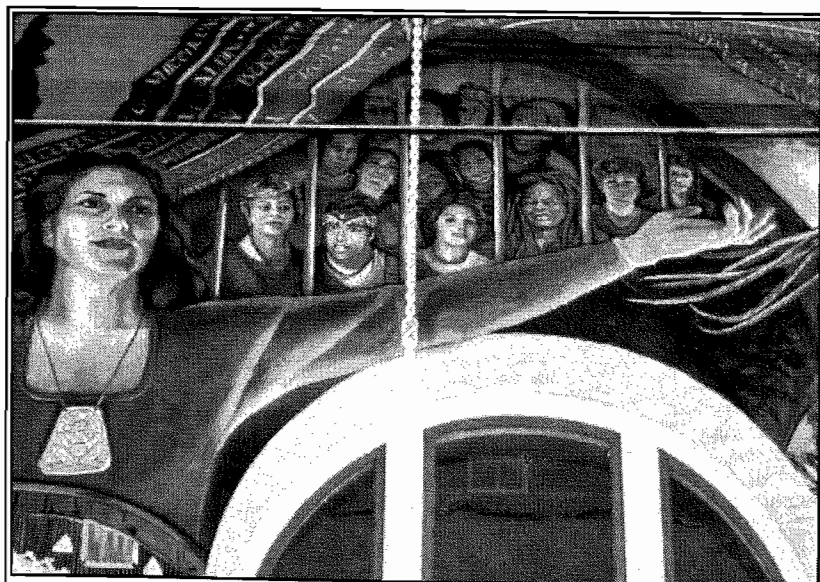
hunger strike in support of the Attica rebellion.

Lolita, along with the other three living Nationalist prisoners, was unconditionally released in 1979 by Jimmy Carter. This was a result of the growing Puerto Rican independence and solidarity movement, as well as the military and political actions by the clandestine organizations which consistently demanded their freedom. In the U.S., communiques accompanying FALN armed actions always made release of the Nationalists a primary demand.

As a leader of the Nationalist Party, Lolita continues to fight for independence. She participated in the campaign on the island of Vieques against U.S. Navy occupation and toured the U.S. in 1980 in support of the 11 Puerto Rican Prisoners of War.



Lolita in custody: 1954



Left to right: Lolita Lebron, Alejandrina Torres, Norma Jean Croy, Marilyn Buck, Merle Austin Afrika, Dylcia Pagan, Susan Rosenberg Maestrapeace, Lapidge Street Facade, San Francisco Women's Building

Assata Shakur

Open Letter from Assata Shakur (edited)
April '98

My name is Assata Shakur, and I am a 20th century escaped slave. Because of government persecution, I was left with no other choice than to flee from the political repression, racism and violence that dominate the US government's policy towards people of color. I am an ex-political prisoner, and I have been living in exile in Cuba since 1984.

I have been a political activist most of my life, and although the U.S. government has done everything in its power to criminalize me, I am not a criminal, nor have I ever been one. In the 1960s, I participated in various struggles: the Black liberation movement, the student rights movement, and the movement to end the war in Vietnam. I joined the Black Panther Party. By 1969 the Black Panther Party had become the number one organization targeted by the FBI's COINTELPRO program...



I was falsely accused in six different "criminal cases" and in all six of these cases I was eventually acquitted or the charges were dismissed. The fact that I was acquitted or that the charges were dismissed did not mean that I received justice in the courts; that was certainly not the case. It only meant that the "evidence..." presented against me was so flimsy and false that my innocence became evident...

On May 2, 1973 I, along with Zayd Malik Shakur and Sundiata Acoli were stopped on the New Jersey Turnpike, supposedly for a "faulty tail light." Sundiata Acoli got out of the car to determine why we were stopped. Zayd and I remained in the car. State trooper Harper then came to the car, opened the door and began to question us. Because we were black, and riding in a car with Vermont license plates, he claimed he became "suspicious." He then drew his gun, pointed it at us, and told us to put our hands up in the air, in front of us, where he could see them. I complied and in a split second, there was a sound that came from outside the car, there was a sudden movement, and I was shot once with my arms held up in the air, and then once again from the back. Zayd Malik Shakur was later killed, trooper Werner Foerster was killed, and even though trooper Harper admitted that he shot and killed

Zayd Malik Shakur, under the New Jersey felony murder law, I was charged with killing both Zayd Malik Shakur, who was my closest friend and comrade, and charged in the death of trooper Forester. Never in my life have I felt such grief.... Neither Sundiata Acoli nor I ever received a fair trial. We were both convicted in the news media way before our trials.... In 1977, I was convicted by an all-white jury and sentenced to life plus 33 years in prison. In 1979, fearing that I would be murdered in prison, and knowing that I would never receive any justice, I was liberated from prison, aided by committed comrades who understood the depths of the injustices in my case, and who were also extremely fearful for my life....

On December 24, 1997, the state of New Jersey called a press conference to announce that New Jersey State Police had written a letter to Pope John Paul II asking him to intervene on their behalf and to aid in having me extradited back to New Jersey prisons. The New Jersey State Police refused to make their letter public. Knowing that they had probably totally distorted the facts, and attempted to get the Pope to do the devil's work in the name of religion, I decided to write the Pope to inform him about the reality of "justice" for Black people in the State of New Jersey and in the United States.

In January of 1998, during the Pope's visit to Cuba, I agreed to do an interview with NBC journalist Ralph Penza around my letter to the Pope, about my experiences in the New Jersey court system, and about the changes I saw in the United States and its treatment of Black people in the last 25 years. I agreed to do this interview because I saw this secret letter to the Pope as a vicious, vulgar publicity maneuver on the part of the New Jersey State Police, and as a cynical attempt to manipulate Pope John Paul II. I have lived in Cuba for many years, and was completely out of touch with the sensationalist, dishonest nature of the establishment media today. It is worse today than it was 30 years ago. After years of being victimized by the "establishment" media it was naive of me to hope that I might finally get the opportunity to tell "my side of the story." Instead of an interview with me, what took place was a "staged media event" in three parts, full of distortions, inaccuracies and outright lies. NBC purposely misrepresented the facts. Not only did NBC spend thousands of dollars promoting this "exclusive interview series" on NBC, they also spent a great deal of money advertising this "exclusive interview" on Black radio stations and also placed notices in local newspapers....

As I watched Governor Whitman's interview [on NBC] the one thing that struck me was her "outrage" at my joy about being a grandmother, and my "quite nice life" as she put it here in Cuba. While I love the Cuban people and the solidarity they have shown me, the pain of being torn away from everybody I love has been intense. I have never had the opportunity to see or to hold my grandchild. If Gov. Whitman thinks that my life has been so

nice, that 50 years of dealing with racism, poverty, persecution, brutality, prison, underground, exile and blatant lies has been so nice, then I'd be more than happy to let her walk in my shoes for a while so she can get a taste of how it feels....

Col. Williams of the New Jersey State Police stated "we would do everything we could to get her off the island of Cuba and if that includes kidnapping, we would do it." I guess the theory is that if they could kidnap millions of Africans from Africa 400 years ago, they should be able to kidnap one African woman today. It is nothing but an attempt to bring about the re-incarnation of the Fugitive Slave Act. All I represent is just another slave that they want to bring back to the plantation. Well, I might be a slave, but I will go to my grave a rebellious slave. I am and I feel like a maroon woman. I will never voluntarily accept the condition of slavery, whether it's de-facto or ipso-facto, official, or unofficial.... With the schools in Paterson, N.J. falling down, with areas of Newark looking like a disaster area, with the crack epidemic, with the wide-spread poverty and unemployment in New Jersey, these depraved, decadent, would-be slave-masters want federal funds to help put this "nigger wench" back in her place. They call me the "most wanted woman" in Amerika. I find that ironic. I've never felt very "wanted" before. When it came to jobs, I was never the "most wanted," when it came to economic opportunities I was never the "most wanted," when it came to decent housing. It seems like the only time Black people are on the "most wanted" list is when they want to put us in prison....

All I have is my voice, my spirit and the will to tell the truth. But I sincerely ask, those of you in the Black media, those of you in the progressive media, those of you who believe in truth, freedom, and to publish this statement and to let people know what is happening. We have no voice, so you must be the voice of the voiceless.

Free all Political Prisoners,
I send you Love and Revolutionary Greetings
From Cuba, One of the Largest, Most Resistant and
Most Courageous Palenques (Maroon Camps)
That has ever existed on the Face of this Planet.

Assata Shakur
Havana, Cuba

No One Can Stop The Rain

Watch, the grass is growing
 Watch, but don't make it obvious.
 Let your eyes roam casually, but watch!
 In any prison yard, you can see it, —growing.
 In the cracks, in the crevices, between the steel and the concrete,
 out of the dead grey dust, the bravest blades
 of grass shoot up, bold and full of life.
 Watch, the grass is growing. It is growing through the cracks.
 The guards say grass is against the law.
 Grass is contraband in prison
 The guards say the the grass is insolent.
 It is ugly grass, radical grass, runaway grass, militant
 grass, terrorists grass, they call it weeds.
 Nasty weeds, nigga weeds, dirty spic, savage indian, wetback,
 pinko, commie weeds, —subversive !
 And so the guards try to wipe out the grass.
 They yank it from its roots.
 They poison it with drugs.
 They maul it.
 They rake it.
 Blades of grass have been found hanging in cells, covered
 with bruises, "apparent suicides."
 The guards say that the "GRASS IS UNAUTHORIZED."
 "DO NOT LET THE GRASS GROW."

WE SAY , "DO NOT STEP ON THE GRASS."
 You can spy on the grass.
 You can lock up the grass.
 You can mow it down, temporarily,
 but you will never keep it from growing.
 Watch, the grass is beautiful.
 The guards try to mow it down, but it keeps on growing.
 The grass grows into a poem.
 The grass grows into a song.
 The grass paints itself across the canvas of life.
 And the picture is clear, and the lyrics are true,
 and haunting voices sing so sweet and strong,
 that the people hear the grass from far away.
 And the people start to dance, and the people start to sing,
 and the song is freedom.
 Watch ! the grass is growing.
 "DO NOT LET THE GRASS GROW"

Assata Shakur

Anna Mae Aquash

From Joy Harjo, *In Mad Love and War*,
Wesleyan University Press, 1990

For Anna Mae Pictou Aquash, Whose Spirit is Present
Here and in the Dappled Stars (for we remember the story
and must tell it again so we may all live)

Beneath a sky blurred with mist and wind,
I am amazed as I watch the violet
heads of crocuses erupt from the stiff earth
after dying for a season,
as I have watched my own dark head
appear each morning after entering
the next world
to come back to this one,
amazed.
It is the way in the natural world to understand the place
that ghost dancers named
after the heart-breaking destruction.

Anna Mae,
everything and nothing changes.
You are the shimmering young woman
who found her voice,
when you were warned to be silent, or have your body cut away
from you like an elegant weed.
You are the one whose spirit is present in the dappled stars.
(They prance and lope like colored horses who stay with us
through the streets of these steely cities. And I have seen them
nuzzling the frozen bodies of tattered drunks
on the corner.)

This morning when the last star is dimming
and the buses grind toward
the middle of the city, I know it is ten years since they buried you

the second time in Lakota, a language that could
free you.

I heard about it in Oklahoma, or New Mexico,
how the wind howled and pulled everything down
in a righteous anger.

(It was the women who told me) and we understood wordlessly
the ripe meaning of your murder.

As I understood ten years later after the slow changing
of the seasons
that we have just begun too touch
the dazzling whirlwind of our anger,
we have just begun to perceive the amazed world the ghost dancers
entered
crazily, beautifully.



In February 1976, an unidentified body of a young woman was found on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. The official autopsy attributed death to exposure. The FBI agent present at the autopsy ordered her hands severed and sent to Washington for fingerprinting. John Trudell rightly called this mutilation an act of war. Her unnamed body was buried. When Anna Mae Aquash, a young Micmac woman who was an active American Indian Movement member, was discovered missing by her friends and relatives, a second autopsy was demanded. It was then discovered she had been killed by a bullet fired at close range to the back of her head. Her killer or killers have yet to be identified.

Judi Bari

Although Judi was never a "prisoner" in the same sense as the other women here, she shared the strength and courage of all the women political prisoners and POWs.

Judi Bari was born November 7, 1949 in Baltimore, Maryland. Her name was etched into the nation's consciousness in 1990 when the car she and fellow Earth First! organizer Darryl Cherney were driving was bombed in Oakland, California. They were organizing for Redwood Summer, protests in Northern California's coastal redwood rainforests. She was nearly killed by a powerful, motion-triggered shrapnel bomb which exploded under the driver's seat, shattering her pelvis, and leaving her disabled and in pain for the rest of her life.... She continued to organize against destruction of redwood forests, including the Headwaters Forest.

She died of complications of breast cancer March 2, 1997 at her cabin home near Willits, California.

Judi refused hospitalization and chemotherapy, choosing to die with dignity in her mountain cabin. (She called it "my hippie shack.") She is survived by her two teenage daughters and other family members.

At the time of the Oakland bombing, Police and the FBI accused Bari of knowingly transporting explosives, but no charges were ever filed. After nearly two months of investigation the Alameda County D.A. refused to file charges due to lack of any evidence against her. A federal civil suit was filed in 1991. The FBI and Oakland police are being sued for false arrest and conspiracy to frame her as a terrorist in order to discredit her and Earth First! in the public's mind, for fabricating evidence, and for failing to even look for the real bombers.



Judi with her children after bombing



Judi and Darryl's car after bombed

Merle Africa

Merle Africa, political prisoner and revolutionary activist member of the MOVE organization, died under suspicious circumstances in a Pennsylvania prison on March 13, 1998 after nearly twenty years of unjust imprisonment. Merle was arrested on August 8, 1978, after a full-scale police assault on the MOVE organization house where Merle and eight other MOVE members were later convicted of shooting a police officer despite lack of any forensic or ballistic evidence proving their culpability. Each was sentenced to a maximum of 100 years.



Woodcut by Laura Whitehorn

The Puerto Rican Independence Struggle

The fourteen Puerto Rican *independentistas* in US prisons today are political activists, most of whom have spent 18 years behind bars. They were workers and professionals, students and teachers, community organizers and artists who found the Puerto Rican condition—on the island and in the United States—intolerable.

Throughout the 1970s they fought against racism and worked to improve access to quality education. They labored to create community institutions: alternative education programs, child care facilities, health services, housing co-ops, recreation facilities, political organizations; and participated in churches, student groups, committees against repression, professional associations, campaigns to stop drug abuse and violence amongst youth.

In waves of arrests between 1980 and 1985, they were convicted of acting or conspiring to act in favor of independence for Puerto Rico and given extraordinarily lengthy sentences. Thirteen of them assumed the position of prisoner of war, declaring they were combatants to free Puerto Rico, and that, under international law, the US government had no jurisdiction to prosecute them. Eleven of them, with sentences of 55 to 105 years, are serving sentences 19 times longer than the average sentence given the year they were sentenced.

Many people in the US may be unaware that the UN denounces colonialism as a crime, recognizes a colonized people's right to end colonialism by any means at their disposal, and affirms that these laws apply to the case of Puerto Rico. Although it may be surprising to some US citizens, the continued incarceration of these men and women is a violation of international law.

Throughout Puerto Rico and the United States a campaign for the release of the PPs and POWs enjoys the support of a wide variety of individuals and organizations. To work for the amnesty of the 15 imprisoned people contact Comité 98, listed at the end of this booklet.

Dylcia Pagán

Dylcia was born in New York in 1946. At an early age she became involved in the civil rights movement, participating in voter registration drives. By age 19, she was a community organizer working in housing, health and educational programs, participating in rent strikes, demonstrations and takeovers. As a student at Brooklyn College she helped organize the Puerto Rican Student Union which resulted in the formulation of a student-controlled Puerto Rican Studies Department. She worked in an agency to assess New York's poverty programs, and later got involved in electoral politics. By the early '70s she began a career as a TV producer and writer developing investigative documentaries and children's programs at NBC, ABC, CBS, and PBS. She worked with the Puerto Rican Media and Education Council, which filed a series of law suits against the major television stations which facilitated the local public affairs programming that still exists today. She also worked as the English editor of a bilingual daily, *El Tiempo*. She was arrested in 1980 and charged with seditious conspiracy and related charges. She is serving a 63 year sentence at the Federal Correctional Institution at Dublin, CA, where she has been active in forming and carrying out programs for and with her sister prisoners. Her son Guillermo was whisked out of the country upon her arrest, for fear that the government would make good on its threats to harm him. After living in San Francisco and Chicago, he is now a student at the University of Puerto Rico.

Biography adapted from a piece written by Puerto Rican POW Alberto Rodríguez.

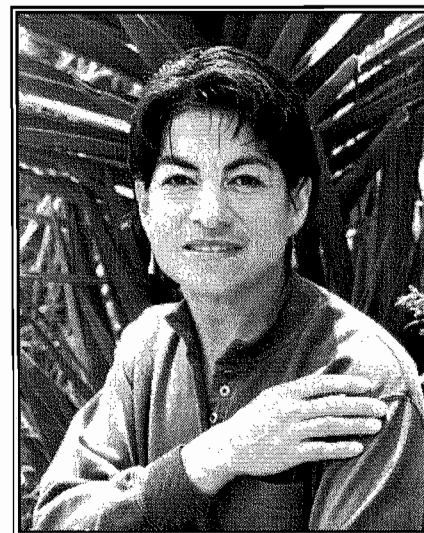


Dylcia and her son Guillermo

Alicia Rodríguez

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

I find it necessary to note that since the beginning of my incarceration, I have imagined the presence of a child always walking alongside of me. Maybe, this child is really me, keeping me connected, curious and responsible. Therefore, for the sake of this "child," I have worked to remain conscious of my thoughts, attitudes and behavior.

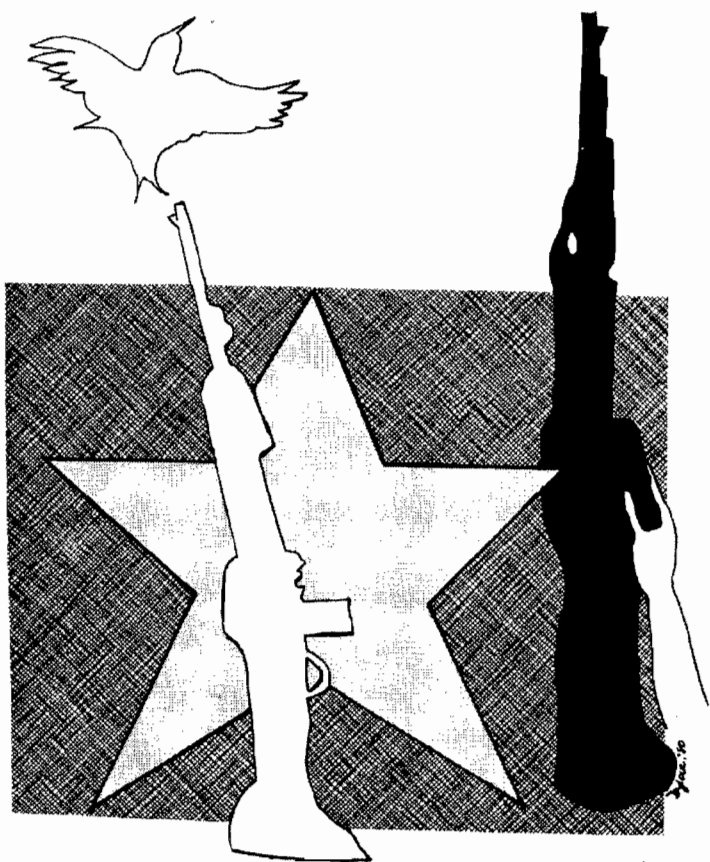


It has never mattered what conditions I have found myself in. I have always sensed the power of choice and the fact that I am never alone. I have never felt isolated even during periods of solitary confinement in prison. I have remained aware of my connections to myself, family, friends, and political struggle. Most of all, I have learned to acknowledge my intuition.

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

struggle against colonialism not withstanding my incarceration.

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



Graphic by Dylcia Pagán

"La Independencia, se logra con violencia!"

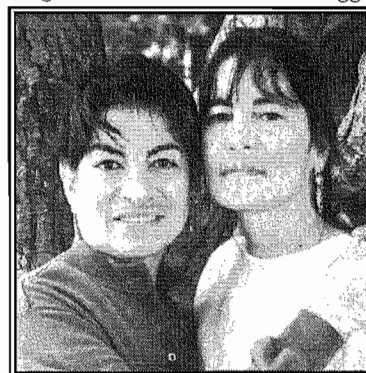
Lucy Rodríguez

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

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

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

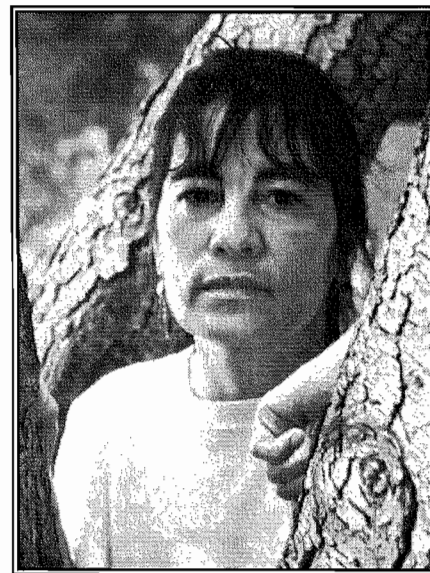
Once i brought to my attention those aspects of myself that i had made invisible, i made space and allowed them to become an active part of my life. It was then that i felt truly engaged in a dialectical process seeking balance between self-awareness and revolutionary social consciousness. i've sought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



my life is critical resistance or at least an honest attempt to make it so.

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

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



Alejandrina Torres

Throughout the 1960s and 70s, she was a leader in her community. She was a founding member and later a teacher at the Puerto Rican High School in Chicago. She later helped found the Betances Health Clinic and was active in boycotts of public schools which continued to miseducate children and were hostile and racist to their parents. At the First Congregational Church, where she worked, she organized a variety of community programs. She also participated in the Committee to Free the Five Nationalists and later became a member of the Committee to Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of War. Throughout her 13 years of imprisonment, and against all odds, given the many years of isolation, and the many physical and psychological assaults, she has maintained a positive attitude. She works with prisoners assisting them in achieving educational, vocational and religious goals. Her release date is 2004. Alejandrina is married to Rev. José Alberto Torres,

born in San Lorenzo, Puerto Rico in 1939. When she was 11 years old her family migrated to the US.



Alejandrina Torres and her two daughters



Alejandrina and her husband
José Alberto Torres

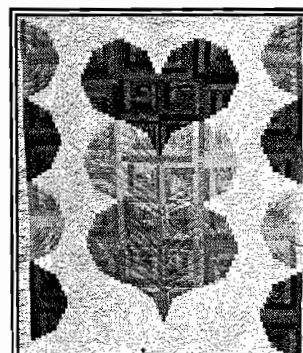
and together they have raised five children: Norma, Carlos Alberto (himself also a political prisoner in Oxford, WI), Nidza, Liza, and Catalina. Liza and Catalina were 15 and 11 when their mother was arrested. Alejandrina has eight grandchildren. She is at the Federal Correctional Institution at Danbury, CT.

Biography adapted from a piece written by Puerto Rican POW Alberto Rodríguez.

Carmen Valentín

time of her arrest she was completing her Doctorate in psychology from Loyola University. Carmen became active in the community as a young teacher at Tuley High School, where she struggled against racism and an educational curriculum based on ignorance of the Puerto Rican reality. She took her role as an educator seriously and refused to compromise her principles with the Board of Education's demands that she ignore the colonial

Carmen was born in Arecibo, Puerto Rico in 1946 and emigrated with her family to the US when she was 10 years old. At the

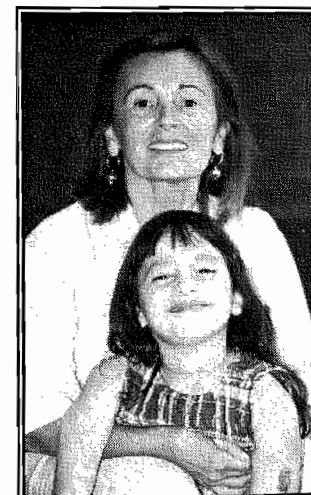


Quilt made by Carmen

plight of her people. Her educational presentations became controversial, as did her participation with students, parents and community members in a student boycott to rid the school of its racist principal. She was forced to resign. While working at a community college, Carmen sponsored both the Iranian Student Association and the Organization of Arab Students during an intense period of struggle and controversy which led to many physical confrontations between students and the local police, as well as with the Shah's secret police.

Carmen was a founding member of the Ruiz-Belvis Education Center and developed various cultural and educational programs at the maximum security prison for men at Stateville, IL. In 1980 she was arrested, charged with seditious conspiracy and related charges, and sentenced to 98 years. Carmen's son Antonio was 10 years old when she was arrested. He is currently studying law near Chicago, and working to support his daughter Karina.

Biography adapted from a piece written by Puerto Rican POW Alberto Rodríguez.



Carmen and her
granddaughter Karina

On the MOVE

The MOVE organization surfaced in Philadelphia during the early 1970s. Characterized by dreadlock hair, the adopted surname "Africa", a principled unity, and an uncompromising commitment to their belief, members practiced the teachings of MOVE founder John Africa.

I am a member of the Philadelphia based chapter of the MOVE ORGANIZATION for 24 years. I am a Political Prisoner. I have been in prison for my belief for 20 years. I have two other MOVE sisters in prison with me for the same thing. Merle Africa, the third one, died while in prison at Cambridge Springs. Many people don't know that there are political prisoners in the United States and especially don't know about women political prisoners and don't want to believe it even if they are told this because the US was founded on religious freedom and they can't understand how a country that was founded on religious freedom would or could contain citizens of this country in their prisons because of their religion.... their beliefs. It's the truth though, and there is a thirty year history behind the MOVE organization....

To make this short and to the point I will say that the main issue here is that we are in prison because we are refused our constitutional right to practice our belief. Whenever we did try to practice our belief we were



Top Row: Debbie Sims Africa, Consuewella Dotson Africa (released), Janine Phillips Africa, Merle Austin Africa (deceased) Bottom Row: Ramona Africa (released) Sue Leon Africa (released) Janet Holloway Africa

harassed, arrested, beat and jailed, which led to the challenging of the constitution and led to the issue of religion and government separatism. One thing led to another and this is the culmination of it, me and my three sisters along with five MOVE men have been given 30-100 years in prison for a crime we did not commit.

Women political prisoners are basically treated like any other prisoner despite the Geneva Convention and the refusal of the government and president to recognize political prisoners, period.

People need to ask themselves why this country is forcing people to live according to this country's accepted religions. This country broke away from England to become independent and practice their own beliefs; they used arms and all other sort of weaponry they could get their hands on and today this defense conduct is accepted, supported and respected, yet not accepted when MOVE fights for our religion.

Women political prisoners are strong not only to take on this fight against the government but because we give up so much more. Our children are bearing this grief, hurt and pain just as we are and more. We are strong just the same because this fight is for our children as well.

On the MOVE - written by Debbie Sims Africa
On behalf of MOVE women political prisoners:
Janine Phillips Africa
Janet Holloway Africa



Mumia Abu-Jamal, friend of the MOVE organization continues to sit on Pennsylvania's death row for a crime he did not commit. An award-winning journalist and former Black Panther, he was wrongly convicted in 1982 of killing a Philadelphia police officer after a trial riddled with injustice. Since then he has been imprisoned on death row. His execution is imminent. We cannot allow Mumia to die. He deserves a new trial. Add your voice to the demand for justice for Mumia and for the more than 100 political prisoners in US prisons.

Silvia Baraldini

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

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



Piazza Sonnino - Trastevere - Roma

exciting to many of the women here that people on the outside are beginning to tackle this issue. Developing an analysis and a strategy to change this situation is essential, but it will work only if prisoners are empowered to participate as equals in

this struggle. Having said this, I extend my solidarity and thanks to everyone who worked long and hard to make this conference [Critical Resistance, Berkeley, CA Sept. 1998] a reality.



International Women's Day demonstration, Rome, Italy

The Letter

Everyday she stood at attention as the officer called out each name. As the pile of mail decreased, her body slowly slumped; a hint of despair and sadness taking over her being. She refused to move until the last piece was identified. Then she dejectedly ambled towards her cell. Today, again, the letter had not arrived.

For eight months her husband had not written. An immutable, stubborn, unbending and aggressive silence was the only answer she had received to the letters, cards, stories and photographs she had sent him. Unable to blame him, she refused to sever contact. She spent hours devising interesting anecdotes, squirreling events to retell and share, and imagining what his daily routine could be like in isolation.

Although separated from him for ten years, she needed his companionship, craved his approval and was hungry for the easy banter they had shared in the past. The longing for his physical presence had been quelled by the passing of time, but she could not give up their emotional connection.

Tonight, she would watch their basketball team play. Afterwards she would write him describing Harper's cunning steals, Ewing's powerful dunks, and Oakley's unceasing defense. She would keep it light, exerting no pressure, seeking no response.

The next day, at four in the afternoon, she would be the first at mail call.

Kathy Boudin

Kathy was born on May 19, 1943. May 19 is also the birthday of Ho Chi Minh, Malcolm X, Augusto Sandino and Lorraine Hansbury. As a child and young adult Kathy planned to be a doctor. In 1960, a visit to Cuba changed Kathy's life profoundly. It presented a vision of how changing the entire structure of society could enable people to have not only better health care but better housing, education and full participation. This raised for Kathy an idea: working to build a movement for social change—to make fundamental changes.



Joining a Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) community organizing project in 1965, she worked with Black women and poor white Appalachian women doing welfare rights organizing. As the war in Vietnam grew, she began doing draft counseling and working to oppose the war. The Civil Rights and Black Liberation movements during the 60s had a great impact on Kathy—these movements taught her about the depth of problems and the potential for change. Historical events, internationalism and the Women's Movement also influenced and shaped her thinking.

From 1971 to 1981 Kathy was underground—until her arrest on October 20, 1981. After two years in isolation and being moved to a variety of jails, she was placed in general population at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, New York State's maximum security prison for women.

While in prison Kathy has been teaching basic literacy and has completed a master's degree in education/adult literacy. She is also active in building a peer counseling and education program around AIDS and is a founding member of A.C.E.—AIDS Counseling and Education Organization. She has a wonderful son who has been the source of much joy and inspiration despite the pain of their separation.



Marilyn Buck

Marilyn began her anti-racist activism as a teen in Texas, later organized against the war in Vietnam, and joined SDS and the SF Newsreel. She fought for self-determination for all people, and aligned herself with the Black liberation movement. Because of her solidarity with the Black Liberation Army (BLA), in 1973 she was targeted and sentenced to prison for 10 years for purchasing two boxes of handgun ammunition. After serving four years in Federal prison in Alderson, West Virginia, she was granted a furlough and did not return. The following eight years she was underground.



In 1985 Marilyn was recaptured and tried for breaching another wall—she was convicted of conspiracy for the successful escape of Assata Shakur from a New Jersey prison, as well as to finance New Afrikan Liberation Movement through expropriations. In 1988 she was also charged with conspiracy to protest and alter government policies (the invasion of Grenada, intervention in Central America) by attacking the U.S. government and military. She has spent 17 years in prison and faces another 30.

Marilyn is currently a correspondence student at New College in San Francisco studying to get a B.A. with a focus in psychology. She remains active in POETRY FOR THE PEOPLE workshops led by UC-Berkeley students from June Jordan's program. Marilyn also continues to be involved in AIDS/HIV peer education despite new straight jacket BOP policies at FCI Dublin that diminish AIDS education to a bare minimum (they've only left a skeleton with no real flesh).

Along with co-defendant Dr. Mutulu Shakur, she may be returning to the court arena for an evidentiary hearing looking at government perjury by the only "conspiracy" witness as well as other prosecution misconduct. Apparently the government refused to produce documents about an undercover agent during original court proceedings.

Marilyn writes "... my goddaughter Tanya Napier continues to grace me with visits and love.... my mother and her husband are surviving the Texas 100 degree drought.... and each day prison is made more endurable by the support of so many of you who work for human dignity and justice against this brutal government which is more and more brazen in its oppression and exploitation of the vast majority of peoples who live here and around the world Thank you."

For Fear Of Being Called

In Peru a demonstration
against a rise in bread prices
is stopped
because of threats to renounce
those who demand bread
as terrorists

we fear language
an electric cattle prod
to drive us into corners
where we cower
for fear of being called
terrorists or communists or
criminals

why do we allow
capitalists and congressmen
to rob us of our language
to intimidate us into cutting out
our tongues
to paralyze our movements?

why are we more afraid
to be called terrorists
than to die in the dark
leaving no one to speak for us?

Marilyn Buck / February 1996

Susan Crane

On Ash Wednesday, February 12, 1997, six of us went to Bath Iron Works in Maine, and boarded the USS Sullivans, a guided missile destroyer. Following the vision of the prophet Isaiah to beat swords into plowshares, we used regular household hammers to begin to convert the weapon and navigational equipment of the ship. We poured our own blood on the weapons to make clear the consequences of war making. Our leaflet said, "We repent of our willingness to deny the world's children a future, and so we act, full of hope."

As a teacher in Ukiah I saw the funds for education cut each year. I saw students who went home to an empty refrigerator and other students who were homeless. Although in class we talked about nonviolent solutions to problems, what the student learned from history books, the streets and our foreign policy was that violence is the norm.

As a parent, I love my two sons, and I know that mothers and fathers in Iraq love their children just as much. But what can I say to a mother who is holding her child - sick and dying of malnutrition? All the money and resources spent on weapons is a theft from this child. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. told us long ago that the choice is no longer between violence and nonviolence, it's between nonviolence or nonexistence.



Susan Crane and her family Robin Collins, King Collins, Susan Crane, Chet Collins

Linda Evans

Linda was born on May 11, 1947, in Fort Dodge, Iowa. She joined Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) while in college at Michigan State, and became a regional SDS organizer against the war in Vietnam and to support Black liberation. In 1969, she participated in an anti-war delegation to North Vietnam to receive US-POWs released by the Vietnamese.

Internationalist, revolutionary, and anti-imperialist, Linda has organized against the Ku Klux Klan, forced sterilization, and police abuse. She has worked with Southern Africa, Palestinian, and Central American solidarity organizations; and has worked to build support for Black/New Afrikan, Puerto Rican, and Native American POWs /political prisoners, and the right of these nations to self-determination.

As a political/cultural worker, Linda was active in a guerrilla street theatre troupe, an all-women's band, and a women's printing and graphics collective in Texas. She was active for many years in the women's liberation movement and in the lesbian community.

In the 1980s, Linda worked to develop a clandestine resistance movement.

She was arrested May 11, 1985: convicted of harboring a fugitive, using false statements to buy four legal guns, and as a member of the Resistance Conspiracy case convicted of "conspiracy to influence, change, and protest policies and practices of the US government.... through the use of violent and illegal means."

Linda has been in prison since 1985. During that time, she has acted as a jailhouse lawyer, and was a founder of PLACE (Pleasanton AIDS

Counseling and Education), an inmate to inmate, peer education program. She has also become an accomplished quilting artist.

She is co-author with her partner, Eve Goldberg, of a booklet entitled "The Prison Industrial Complex and The Global Economy."



When the Prison doors are opened the real dragons will fly out - Ho Chi Minh

Laura Whitehorn

As a woman, a lesbian, and a socialist, I've always seen fighting for my own liberation as integral to revolutionary process.

Without resistance, hope has no future.

I am a revolutionary anti-imperialist political prisoner. I was arrested in 1985 for acts of armed struggle against the racism and colonialism of the u.s. government. Since the 60s it's been clear to me that white progressives inside the u.s. need to act to stop the war crimes and human rights violations of our government against Puerto Rico, the New Afrikan or Black nation, Mexicano and Native American nations and the people of the world.

For 20 years before my arrest, I was active in anti-imperialist and anti-racist groups, and in the movements for women's and gay liberation. I worked on campaigns to free political prisoners like Assata Shakur, Sundiata Acoli, the 5 Puerto Rican Nationalists and Geronimo ji-jaga "Pratt". Along with five co-defendants (the "Resistance Conspiracy 6"), I was indicted for "conspiracy to oppose, protest, and change the policies and practices of the u.s. government in domestic and international matters by violent and illegal means."

In prison, I've worked on AIDS/HIV peer education and support programs. My projected release date to a half way house is February 1999.



[Ed. Note: Laura is an exceptional artist as well. She writes poetry and has exhibited her drawings, collages and stamp art as part of the internationally traveled Mumia Art Show and in other shows.]



*Ode to a Prison Guard:
Prison Dreams*

The first 10 years
I dreamed:
 running on rocky beaches
 salty ocean shores
long humid nights
 hot sex
 cool jazz
 and intimate breezes
lavender summer evenings
 and passionate political acts.

Now
I dream:
 an hour alone
 solitary quiet
 an unrushed shower
 enough time to stretch
 a day without a friend's anguish
 after costly minutes
listening to small voices of pain
 through telephone wires
distant children
loss of mothers

My warder,
 keeper of the keys,
you fear my hidden thoughts
but do you ever
 wonder
how my dreams have aged?

*Laura Whitehorn
FCI Dublin, 1997*

School of the Americas (Assassins)

On July 23, in Columbus, GA, Federal Judge J. Robert Elliott sentenced five School of the Americas (SOA) protesters to serve prison terms of up to 12 months. Kathleen Rumpf was remanded into custody immediately while the other four were allowed to self-surrender at a date to be determined.

Three SOA women protesters were sentenced, including: 60-year-old Sr. Marge Eilerman of Booneville, KY who was sentenced to 14 months; Kathleen Rumpf, 47, of Syracuse, NY, sentenced to 12 months; and Mary Trotochaud, 47, of Atlanta, GA who was given 14 months in federal prison. Additionally, fines and restitution varied from \$1,000 to \$3,050 with two years supervised probation for each.

On March 2, 1998, the three women and two men most recently sentenced were found guilty of "destruction of government property with malicious intent," a felony. In their September 29, 1997 protest, the five pruned metal letters off Ft. Benning's main entrance sign, and stenciled in their place: "Home of School of Americas/school of shame" and "SOA=torture".

Defendant Kathleen Rumpf stated that "SOA graduates are notorious for abusing their own people." Mary Trotochaud noted the "irony of going to prison when SOA graduates implicated in the hemisphere's most atrocious human rights violations remain free." Sister Marge Eilerman adds, "our time in prison will be worth it if it hastens the closure of the SOA. Given the scale of terrorism perpetrated by SOA-trained militaries now operating in Chiapas, Mexico and Colombia, the stakes are high."

The five defendants announced they would fast every Thursday for the duration of their sentences. This will be done "in solidarity with each other, our supporters, and other prisoners of conscience. But most importantly we fast with the hungry and the poor of Latin America—especially the indigenous people of Chiapas and the people of Colombia—who are the immediate victims of the US Army School of the Americas." Everyone is invited to join them in their weekly fast.

Updated information can be obtained at the web site:

<http://www.soaw.org>

Theresa Cruz

Theresa Cruz was abused for five years before she confided in a friend who then shot the abuser in the legs. Although the abuser did not suffer any permanent injury, Theresa was accused of conspiracy to commit murder. During her trial, the judge didn't allow testimony on her abuse, and she was convicted and sentenced to 7-25 years in prison. Theresa, her mother, and her children have fought ceaselessly to win Theresa's release. In April 1998, after seven and a half years in prison, a federal appeals judge overturned Theresa's conviction. The state of California has appealed the ruling to the ninth district court and Theresa was given bail during the appeals process and was released to her home and four children in early July. But California then won an appeal of the bail and forced Theresa back to prison after 18 days of freedom, devastating her family.

Theresa writes, "As I sit here realizing that within 24 hours I will be turning myself in to prison, this all feels like a dream. It's so hard to believe that one moment I can touch, feel and love my children and the next minute it is all taken away so fast for no reason. When I sit in my cell I will wonder, 'was I ever really out', and the heartache of my children will be there with me. I am lost for words."



Ana Lucia Gelabert

Ana was born in Cuba, July 6, 1938. She trained as an engineer at the University of Puerto Rico, University of Houston, and UCLA. She had no prior criminal record until 1984 when she was convicted of attempted capital murder for which she received a life sentence. She is the mother of three, the youngest 28, the eldest 33. There has been no contact with them for more than 10 years (their choice). All three are professionals, raising their own families and pursuing their chosen lives. Ana's most important current activity is pursuing a federal habeas in Houston. If successful, it could lead to a new trial. The major questions seem to be that jurors received two irreconcilable and contradictory instructions on the necessity for conviction and essential definitions of "specific intent". "...The law favors me. BUT...." Ana writes "...I continue to be supportive of the Cuban revolution and the People's War in Peru. As well as worldwide socialism. Here in TDC, I am trying to get out of close custody, even taking much shit I wouldn't normally take...."



Because in close custody where she is currently imprisoned women are not allowed access to the law library and cannot earn any good time credits. "...meanwhile, I try to read, study, do some writing, thinking, and of course stay alive and in one piece! Much violence here! This is the most violent place I have been in during these 14 years...."

She tells us that at least 2 prisoners have died during the hottest summer in Texas history. Governor George Bush ordered A/C turned off in Texas prisons in order to conserve energy; so temperatures probably were about 120 degrees in some cells. President Clinton released funds for emergency repairs of poor folks A/C and to purchase fans, but not until 130 had died. Ana says, "...the struggle for a just society must continue; I believe socialism and the next revolutionary wave just now emerging will launch us into a socialist society at a much higher qualitative level than anything we've ever seen. Meaning a much more democratic form than China or Cuba or USSR were capable of in their time. For this we must struggle today, prepare ourselves ideologically, confident in the future. Do not dismay...."

Resource List

Out of Time

3543 18th St. box 30
San Francisco, CA 94110
outoftime@igc.org
Published by the Out of
Control Lesbian Committee to
Support Women Political
Prisoners and Prisoners of War

Libertad

2607 W. Division
Chicago, IL 60622
News and information from
the National Committee to
Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of
War

Prison Legal News

2400 NW 80th St. #148
Seattle, WA 98117
Written by and for prisoners

The Fire Inside newsletter

c/o California Coalition for
Women Prisoners
100 McAllister St.
San Francisco, CA 94102
<http://www.prisonactivist.org/ccwp>
ccwp@igc.org

Legal Services for Prisoners

• with Children

Same info as *The Fire Inside*

Coalition for Prisoners Rights

Box 1911
Santa Fe, NM 87504

Walking Steel

Box 578172
Chicago, IL 60657
CEML@aol.com
Newsletter of the Committee
to End the Marion Lockdown,
also published *Can't Jail the
Sprit*, a book with biographies
of political prisoners and pris-
oners of war in the u.s.

California Prison Focus

2489 Mission St. #28
San Francisco, CA 94110
Publishes *Prison Focus*
Newsletter

Families with a Future

100 McAllister St.
San Francisco, CA 94102

HIV in Prison (HIP)

2489 Mission St. #28
San Francisco, CA 94110

Comité 98

548 20th St.
Oakland, CA
800-431-4848, ext. 126
510-893-3181, ext. 126
<http://www.wco.com/~boricua/POWS>
Works for Puerto Rican inde-
pendence and freedom for
political prisoners and POWs

This Just In

103 Bartlett Ave
Pittsfield, MA 01201
Monthly updates on political
prisoners and POWs

Transformation

c/o Women's Project
2224 Main St.
Little Rock, AR 72206
wproject@aol.com
Quarterly newsletter for social
and economic justice by groups
working with women prisoners
since 1989

PWA RAG INC

1626 N. Wilcox Ave #537
Los Angeles, CA 90028
ragnews@aol.com
Quarterly published by
Prisoners with AIDS Rights
Advocacy Group Inc.

RAZE the WALLS

Box 720418
Orlando, FL 32872
Prisoner support and abolition
work

Prison Activist Resource Center

PO Box 339
Berkeley, CA 94701
510-845-8813
<http://www.prisonactivist.org/parc@prisonactivist.org>

Anarchist Black Cross Federation

NJ ABC -BG
P.O. Box 8532
Patterson, NJ 07508-8532
<http://burn.ucsd.edu/~abcf>
Newsletter and Warchest
(fund for political prisoners)

Release Silvia!

3543 18th St. #30
San Francisco, CA 94110
or PO Box 021140
Brooklyn, NY 11202
<http://www.justice-for-silvia.org>
Committee to return Silvia
Baraldini to Italy

Beat Within

660 Market St. #210
San Francisco, CA 94104
<http://www.pacificnews.org/yo/beat>

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1992 Statistics Packet, National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered
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Prison Statistics

Prisons and Social Control: Who goes to prison?

The United States spends more on prisons and incarcerates more people than any other industrialized country in the world. Over five million are in prison, on parole or probation, or are incarcerated in INS detention centers.

Between 1971 and 1992, public spending on prisons alone jumped from \$2.3 billion to \$31.2 billion. Altogether, corrections spending is growing at a faster rate than Medicaid, higher education, and Aid to Families with Dependent Children. In 1995, prison building expenditures jumped by \$926 million while university construction dropped by \$954 million.

The so-called "War on Drugs" has made poor people, people of color, women, youth, and undocumented immigrants the primary targets of the prison industrial complex.

In 1970 there were 5,600 women in federal and state prisons. By 1996, there were 75,000. Sixty percent of that population are Black and Latina.

These statistics are from the Fall 1998 edition of ColorLines.

Women in Prison

Of the 45 women on death row nationwide in 1993, almost half (approximately 49%) had a history of abuse and are there for the murder of an abusive spouse or lover. Most women imprisoned for killing an abusive partner are first-time offenders.

The rate at which women are incarcerated is faster than men and women are the fastest growing sector of the prison population. In 1979, women were sent to prison for nonviolent crimes roughly 49% of the time. In 1986, women were sent to prison for nonviolent crimes roughly 59% of the time. In 1991, women were sent to prison for nonviolent crimes roughly 70% of the time.

The American Correctional Association in a 1987 survey of 200 jails found that only 47% of the jails allowed contact visits between incarcerated women and their children. In California, only 8 out of a total of 56 county jail systems offer a special parent/child extended contact visitation program.

Women prisoners spend on average 17 hours a day in their cell with 1 hour outside for exercise. Compare to men prisoners who spent on average 15 hours a day in their cell with one-and-a-half hours outside.

A survey conducted in 38 states revealed that 58% of the prisons or jails serve exactly the same diet to pregnant prisoners as to others, and in most cases, these diets do not meet the minimum recommended allowances for pregnancy.

These statistics are from a fact sheet by the Prison Activist Resource Center

How to Reach the Women

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Janine Phillips Africa #006309
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5701 8th St., Camp Parks
Dublin, CA 94568

Laura Whitehorn
#22432-037
5701 8th St., Camp Parks
Dublin, CA 94568
projected date of release to
halfway house 2/99

Theresa Cruz
#W-40058
CIW
Frontera, CA 91720

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#384484
Riverside, 1401 State School Rd
Gatesville, TX 76599

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