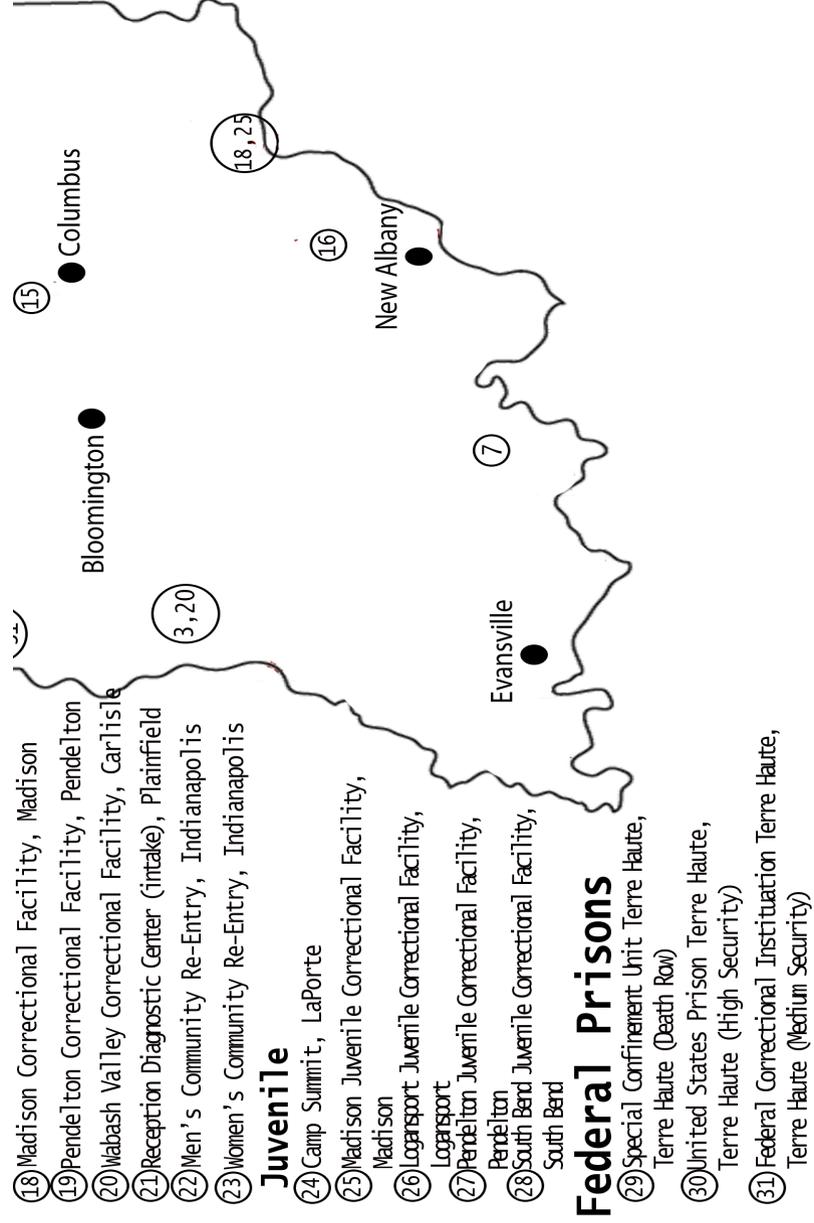


DOWN:

*Reflections on Prison
Resistance in Indiana*

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Indiana State Prisons

Death Row

- ① Indiana State Prison, Michigan City

Maximum Security

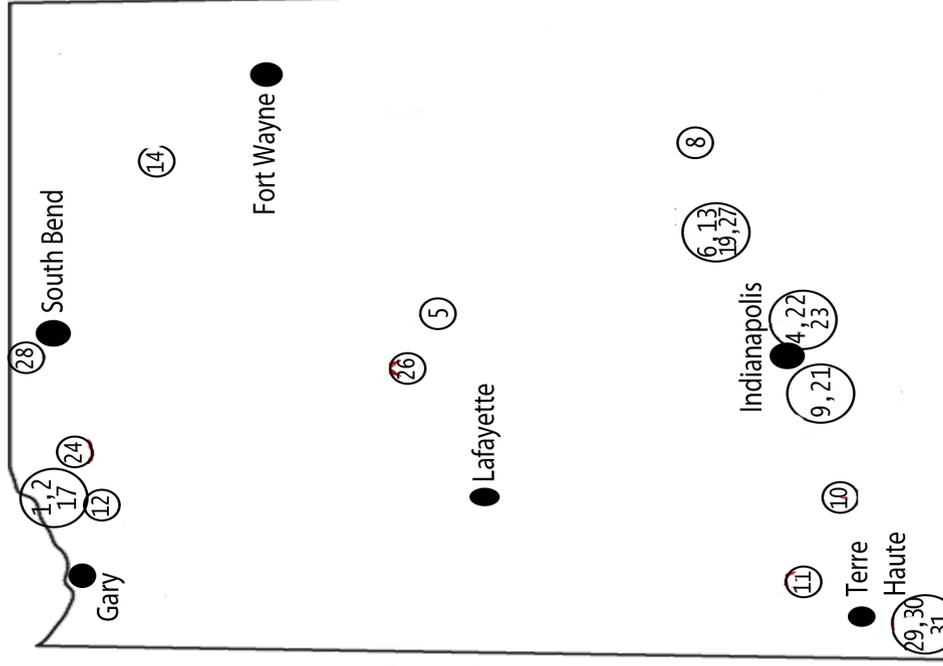
- ② Indiana State Prison, Michigan City
 ③ Wabash Valley Correctional Facility, Carlisle
 ④ Indiana Women's Prison, Indianapolis
 ⑤ Miami Correctional Facility, Bunker Hill
 ⑥ Pendleton Correctional Facility, Pendleton

Medium Security

- ⑦ Branchville Correctional Facility, Branchville
 ⑧ New Castle Correctional Facility, New Castle
 ⑨ Plainfield Correctional Facility, Plainfield
 ⑩ Putnamville Correctional Facility, Greencastle
 ⑪ Rockville Correctional Facility, Rockville
 ⑫ Westville Correctional Facility, Westville
 ⑬ Correctional Industrial Facility, Pendleton

Minimum Security

- ⑭ Chain 'O Lakes Correctional Facility, Albion
 ⑮ Edinburgh Correctional Facility, Edinburgh
 ⑯ Henryville Correctional Facility, Henryville
 ⑰ Indiana State Prison, Michigan City



appendix b

map of all prisons in Indiana

-Spain v. Procunier 600 F.2d 189 (9th Circ. 1979) *the denial of fresh air and regular outdoor exercise and recreation constitutes cruel and unusual punishment*

-Turner v. Safley 482 U.S. 78 *finding that prison regulations that affect constitutional rights can only be upheld if they have a rational connection to a legitimate government interest*

-Wilson v. Seiter 111 S.Ct. 2321 (1991) *some conditions of confinement may establish an 8th amendment violation in combination when each would not do so alone, but only when they have a mutually enforcing effect that produces the deprivation of a single, identifiable human need such as food, warmth or exercise*

-Monroe v. Pape 81 S.Ct. 473 (1961) *holding that officials who violate rights by acting illegally or abusing their authority are acting under color of state law under §1983*

-Koch v. Lewis 216 F.Supp.2d 994 (D. Ariz. Sept 20, 2001) *deals with being labeled a gang member*

-Delaney v. Detella 256 F.3d 679 (CA 7 (ILL.) 2001) *deals with lockdown and your right to have exercise*

-Meriwether v. Faulkner 821 F.2d 408 (CA 7 (Ind.) 1987) *deals with indefinite segregation*

-Sandin v. Conner 115 S.Ct. 2293 (U.S. Hawaii 1995) *deals with you having to establish an atypical and significant hardship before you can challenge segregation*

-Thornburgh v. Abbott 109 S.Ct. 1874 (1989) *deals with your right to communicate with the outside world.*

-Procunier v. Martinez 94 S.Ct. 1800 (1974) *deals with your right to communicate with the outside world.*

-Smith v. Farley 858 F.Supp. 806 (N.D. Ind. 1983) *finding violation of prisoners' due process rights where he was not allowed to admit a potentially exculpatory letter into evidence in absence of security reasons for such denial*

-Hoptowit v. Spellman 753 F.2d 779 (9th Cir. 1985) *holding that hazardous work environment, inadequate lighting, plumbing, fire safety, ventilation and vermin infestation could constitute inhumane conditions*

-Ramos v. Lamn 639 F.2d 559 (10th Circ. 1980) *holding that a state must provide prisoners with reasonably adequate food, clothing, shelter, sanitation, medical care and personal safety as to avoid the imposition of cruel and unusual punishment*

-French v. Owens 777 F.2d 1250 (7th Circ. 1985) *holding that overcrowding, medical neglect and failure to protect inmates from threats to safety violated the 8th amendment*

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appendix a

list of court cases mentioned in the second interview

- Wilkinson v. Austin 125 S.Ct. 2384 *deals with procedural due process*
- Faver v. Bayh 689 NE2d 727 (Ind. App. 1997) *deals with equal protection*
- Piggie v McBride 277 F.3d 922 (CA 7 (Ind.) 2002) *deals with due process*
- Smith v. Stoner 594 F. Supp. 1091 (N.D. Ind. 1984) *deals with due process*
- Mathews v. Eldridge 96 S.Ct. 893 (U.S. Va. 1976) *deals with procedural due process*
- Heckler v. Mathews 104 S.Ct. 1387 (U.S. Ala. 1984) *deals with equal treatment*
- Wolff v. McDonnell 94 S.Ct. 2963 (1974) *deals with procedural due process*

“The struggle of people against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.”

-Milan Kundera

Every year, the Indiana Department of Corrections is required to issue a comprehensive report on the prison system it administers. Available at the IDOC website, it places at your fingertips not only a variety of statistics and facts – that there were 28,885 people held in its facilities last year, twice as many as in 1990, or that prisoners in Plainfield are employed digitizing GIS map data while Pendleton inmates are, more traditionally, compelled to build lounge furniture—but also canned statements from high-ranking administrators and glamor shots of the well-trimmed lawns outside of the dozen or so major prisons in the state. But between all that, the hard numbers and the obfuscatory fluff, there’s a common goal: the effort to progressively organize, justify, and conceal the reality of the mass imprisonment and torture

of tens of thousands of human beings. The high ratio of prison lawn pictures to images of the actual living conditions endured by prisoners, let alone the prisoners themselves, is a good initial demonstration of the intentions and priorities of the PR men who drew up this report.

This book's goal is to be the exact opposite of all that, a counter-report on a project as long-standing as the IDOC itself: the subversion of the prison system. However, this project does not have a budget allowing it to issue reports, nor does it have employees or a fixed membership. Instead, it is constituted, year after year, decade after decade, by successive generations of prisoners who organize to resist brutality and exploitation within the prison walls, and by family members and others on the outside who protest the horrors inflicted by IDOC beneath the slick images it presents for public consumption.

Due to the informal and broad nature of this project, a comprehensive summary is impossible, let alone an annual report. Valiant efforts have been made to overcome these obstacles, though. *Human Rights Held Hostage*, a newsletter produced during the 1990s through collaboration between inmates and outside supporters, is an outstanding example, particularly in its contributions to concrete struggles on the inside. The present book is another collaborative effort between those in struggle on the inside and on the outside. In this way, not only its intentions but its means are opposite to those of the IDOC report. Instead of a coherent, pretty, and fundamentally dishonest representation, our goal is to share a messy, complicated and sometimes ugly narrative from the perspective of the people who live it.

This book's method, though, shouldn't be confused with the kind of "participant-research" popular among some academics and sociologists. If we expose the violence and contradictions beneath the claims of the prison administrators, it's not to tell the "real story" for the sake of disinterested observers and career advancement. Our only goal is to contribute to the subversion of the prison system by helping to transmit memories and methods of struggle. We want to develop complicities of struggle among inmates, between inmates and supporters outside, and with all those in Indiana who hate confinement

I: Of course, there's no question about that. No question about that at all. Symbolic actions are important. Over the last ten years, I can't name hardly any symbolic actions that have been made in the "name of the collective". It's something that's really lacking. I think it would, in fact, make a significant difference in the docile mentality that's rampant today in Indiana prisons.

and prison. This book is only a tool toward that end.

While the IDOC's progress can be measured in expensive buildings and miles of barbed wire, in the numbers of new guards sworn in, and the pages of glossy reports, our side's progress can only be considered qualitatively: in the relations of power on the cell-block, by the legitimacy of prison uprisings throughout the wider populace, through the memories of hardship, isolation and, sometimes, the joy of struggle and victory against overwhelming odds. This very incomparability is what allows many to claim that our side, our project of freedom and the destruction of the prisons, does not exist. Their vision is narrowed until they can only see numbers, and their judgment impaired until they trust only glossy pages and lying images. Against the imposing concrete walls and the coiled razor wire, the guns, tasers and batons of the guards, and everyone who'd erase decades of struggle and human experience, we assert here the possibility of memory, the transmission of experience, and of rebellion.

people just wants the results. They don't want the process of how you got the results, they just want the results—"ok, he's winning, he's winning," they don't want to know how he won, they just wanna know that he's winning.

O: In that regard, in what sort of specific ways do you feel like shows of support from the outside would be beneficial? Are you talking about solidarity actions, distribution of materials, setting up networks of communication or anything else?

I: Well, really I think it's a combination of them all. I think the distribution of progressive materials, genuine connections being built with certain prisoners that's doing the work and also a public show of solidarity out there for certain issues. For example, in July this past year, at Pendleton, there was a prisoner that was murdered here, allegedly an Aryan Brotherhood member, and his alleged attacker was a Latin. And he was killed, he was stabbed to death. They ended up putting the whole state on lockdown. Now a radical group, supporting and aiding prison struggle, if they had gone to downtown Indianapolis, to the IDOC headquarters, and protested, and said to the DOC, "All these other prisoners on lockdown, you need to let them off lockdown. Why they got to be punished, why can't they families visit them, why can't they go to recreation, why are they deprived from the law library?" If a group of people had done that, it would have had a big impact in here, cause it would have made the news. And once they had seen that, it would have made a certain portion of the prisoner collective, particularly the lumpen, more confident in what they're doing to change the conditions around here. Without that visual of support, a lot of these prisoners can't get with you, they think you're just a fall guy. And they don't want to ball with you, they don't want no part of being a fall guy.

O: So, as a note, sort of in summary of what I see you writing here, even purely symbolic actions, actions that the people engaged in them know their goals won't be met, those sorts of things are still important visually as inspiration and as backup?

seems like the prisoncrats have suppressed the political consciousness and collective struggle of Indiana inmates over the last 10 years.

O: What's interesting to note in this story you told about the 2001 incident is that it seems like the initial actions were based on a sense of solidarity amongst inmates, particularly with the one prisoner being beaten up and bloodied, but once the actions had occurred, that solidarity all but disappeared.

I: Yeah, that's true, that's very interesting that you bring that up. Because it was like that, it's every once in awhile you'll see this glimpse of solidarity that exists, but once that's gone, it's every man for himself again. I do think that the culture, the situation of everybody being so divided... when I look at the process of everyone becoming divided and submissive, I really do think the biggest contributing factor is the mixing up of levels. It really takes the wind out of a movement. If you've got the majority of people in your group saying "No, I don't got time for that, I'm gonna go home," it really takes the morale out of the whole collective engagement.

What could change this, I think, is maybe a small group of prisoners who are conscious and equipped with teaching techniques and materials, while at the same time able to stay low key, under the radar of the administration and the agent provocateurs, so to speak. Cause there are a lot of guys in population working for IA; you know, they get busted with some wine or something and they say, "Whoa, whoa, just give me a little bit of time, I'll get you some information." There's a lot of prison intelligence running rampant through the collective of Indiana prisoners. But I think a group of prisoners who can deal with that, who can bring forth they consciousness and let people know this shit is for real, in concert with dedicated individuals in society who are for real, who say what they mean and do what they say, those two elements within themselves will produce a great deal of change. Other prisoners will see that these individuals are for real and the people they're connected with on the outside are for real, they're really gonna do shit. Nowadays

outside analysis

This piece represents the ideas and analyses of various folks who have been and/or are currently working on prisoner solidarity issues—some of them involved in the production of this book, others not. At its crux, this piece is attempting to locate some sort of meaningfully radical way of engaging in solidarity with prisoners, of joining in struggle with them. It's difficult to criticize one's friends, let alone criticize oneself. This piece has attempted to take up that challenge, reflecting critically, though concisely, on the nature of radical prisoner solidarity in an attempt to distill concrete lessons learned and push forward with a new vision of co-struggle towards the destruction of prisons/prison society.

Some people here in southern Indiana who'd done "prison activism" for a few years, and perhaps seen themselves as prison abolitionists, have been discussing together the current state of anarchist solidarity and intervention in US prisons. We reviewed various frustrations we had with our past work, talked to the prisoners we're in touch with, and tried to read the dim map of possible futures—how could we live in

a time when every prison uprising is met with common struggle from the other side of the wall, when we share experiences, analysis, and real relationships, when prison solidarity is a threat?

From these discussions, we renewed our idea of the project¹: to inspire, facilitate and support action on the inside and outside against the prison system/prison society. We see three obvious focus points at which to begin our intervention.

The first, represented in part by this book, is to create a history of prison rebellion in Indiana and to distribute it on both sides of the walls. We have asked several prison rebels in the state to share their experience and knowledge, researched a timeline of documented revolt, and gathered our own analysis. Our aim with this part of the project is to put “prison rebellion” or “rebellion against the prison system” back into the forefront of people’s thoughts and actions, back into the everyday life of folks struggling on the inside, back into the actions of radicals on the outside. This information, this history, is hard for us to know here on the outside, and, from what we’ve been told, not many younger prisoners know it either.

Anything we write or compile, of course, will only be a partial history, constrained by the very real limitations in place that block the dissemination of information and sharing of experiences. What we’re striving for here is not some comprehensive account of all struggle in Indiana prisons, but rather a point from which to start talking about it again, to remember the past and move into the future. We hope to continue gathering personal stories and sharing them amongst ourselves, in an effort to ever deepen our understanding of the prison/prison society we live in.

Secondly, we have to develop real and sustainable interactions between and amongst folks on the inside and outside. This will be articulated mainly by our practice, not explained here; but what we’re getting at is moving beyond the pen-pal model of prisoner support, beyond the

1: we hate to call it a ‘project’, as we think that conceptualizes it too much as a thing to be worked on as opposed to something to be lived, but we’ll continue

2 using the word until we think of something better.

really went down,” you know, it wasn’t no Attica or anything.

So I went on with my incarceration, thinking about my case, going to school, staying out of the way so to speak. And so I was in college study classes in early November that year when guards rushed in the class, apprehended me and took me directly to the SHU. Later I was informed that a Confidential Informant (CI) had stated that I had started it, that I had assaulted one of the guards. And the disciplinary hearing board found me guilty on the word of the CI, even though the officer that I allegedly assaulted testified that it was a white inmate who was beating on him, and they took me to the SHU for a year. Upon getting out of the SHU after a year, the next November, I was taken directly to Administrative Segregation, which was a different part of the SHU, and I was there for the next 9 years. That was the biggest sort of disturbance that I had experienced personally.

The other big uprising that has happened in the past decade, that had effects across the system, was the Arizona prisoners in Newcastle, Indiana in 2007. These prisoners from Arizona were exported to Newcastle Prison because of overcrowding in that state, to do they time here. What I heard was that the Arizona prisoners were really upset about the rules, that you couldn’t smoke, about all the commissary rules and such, and so they started rioting. They just tore it up, they tore up a multi-million dollar facility in just a matter of minutes.

Some of the individuals who were responsible for starting it, allegedly, they were sent to the SHU. But, because of they solidarity and strength, when they came to the SHU, they tore it up too. And at that point the Indiana officials figured they would cut they losses and they just sent the prisoners back to Arizona. I don’t know if they were eventually made to pay for damages or had time lost, or what happened. Those are the two things that really stand out to me in the last 10 years.

Other than that, you’ve just got a lot of gang banging, lots of prisoner on prisoner violence, or sporadic instances of a prisoner assaulting a guard. But these acts don’t have any sort of political or social critique behind them, they’re just random acts, reactionary violence. It really

guards back cause I too was fed up, but nothing happened. It seemed like we were waiting on the elders or the so called “old Gs” to make they move, but nobody done it when we were on rec. So because of that, me and a lot of others got exhausted on the idea, and everybody went back to the cell house and went to take a shower.

While I was taking a shower, I see this range guard getting assaulted by white, African American, and Latino prisoners. Then all of a sudden I see the female guard from earlier heading out towards the melee yelling “Hey, you sons-a-bitches, you stop this! You get off him.” And then this Caucasian dude comes up and hits her in the mouth, pow! Drop to the floor, she fell down with blood pouring out of her mouth. A couple of seconds go by and she gets back up and staggers towards the wall with her walkie talkie, calling “1010, emergency, we need help now!” and she gets dropped again by another white inmate. She gets back up quicker this time and starts calling the emergency more frantically. And in a matter of time, the COs finally rally up, and they subdue the melee and the prisoners end up back in their cells.

On that particular day, they really showed their force, they looked like a paramilitary group coming through there. They probably had 40 officers that marched in, full riot gear and big guns. I don’t know if the guns had bullets or some sort of bean bag or something, but they looked like real guns to me. They also had a bunch of dogs with them. And they went around checking everybody’s hands to see who may have been involved. Before the night’s end, there were 4 or 5 prisoners taken immediately to the SHU.

As the weeks passed, there were prisoners yelling things like “I want to get off lockdown! If you all know who done this you all better tell.” And like I said, Internal Affairs came through pulling people out of their cells for questioning. And in that process, I think, you had a bunch of prisoners who had snitched on other prisoners or just made up lies about the situation. Time passed, and eventually they let us off lockdown. And me personally, by October me and my cellmate at the time were attending GED classes at the time, just going to school, attending classes. As I thought back on it, I wasn’t thinking “Wow, it

one-off letter writing night hosted by a radical group somewhere, beyond the walls that stifle communication between prisoners in different facilities. We aspire to create networks of communication, networks of support and action, a complicity of struggle based on shared goals and solid comradeship—to break down walls of separation, walls of silence, walls of fear that have been built up between people seeking similar things.

While exchanging letters is certainly an important way to get to know new comrades (sometimes the only way), we need to move beyond the initial banalities and towards honest communication through which we can express our political views and ambitions and figure out how we can genuinely support each other in the struggle to destroy the prison system/prison society. Whatever material forms this takes may not be original, but we hope the content will strike closer to the heart of things than what we’ve experienced in the past.

The third aspect of this “project” is mostly based in our own positions here on the outside (though it could certainly benefit greatly from inside/outside collaboration): exposing and facilitating action against various manifestations of prison society. It will consist, at least in part, of putting together concrete catalogues and critiques of police forces, surveillance forces, probation forces, citizen snitch organizations, etc. The intention here is to compile and create materials to distribute to folks as educational tools from which to take action against these forces. This action is not dictated by the materials, but rather simply informed by them.

This, too, is not a new or unique idea. It does, however, strive to learn from the mistakes of the past, to avoid the metaphorical and literal traps inherent in popular education campaigns we’ve seen happen time and time again. That is to say, we’re not calling for the establishment of an “anti-police” organization, the formation of another reformist group licking the boots of city hall, another anarchist recruiting campaign. We’re not trying to “convince” anyone, we’re not trying to “win them to our team”, and we’re certainly not trying to tell them what to do. What we’re aiming for here is to flood the area with the specific

knowledge necessary to take calculated, meaningful and secure action against those forces of oppression towards which an ever-increasing number of people already harbor a strong hatred.

In the forming of this vision, we reviewed our past experiences and found much to avoid and learn from. We see this project as a negative one, as it must negate past forms of support and activism as much as it does prison itself—not maliciously, as if we didn't believe comrades genuinely tried, or as if we didn't take part in these actions ourselves—but so we can critically move through and past them.

We are frustrated, for example, by the character of the famous political prisoner. Here we refer to instances of individual political prisoners, whatever that might mean, building (or having built on their behalf) campaigns that deal with their particular cases, their personalities, and the particular grievances they might have against prisons or the “justice” system. This isn't to say that these people don't deserve support—they're our family, and we love them dearly. What frustrates us about these sorts of campaigns is the necessary individualization or isolation of this one inmate from the rest of the prisoners, often, if not structurally, resulting in the denial of a strong critique of the institutions that control them. That is, mostly these campaigns deal with the illegality of one person's incarceration, not with the plight of the many prisoners daily engaging in struggle against their conditions, or the concentrated evil of the prisons themselves. These people become celebrities or figureheads; anyone can sign a petition or hold a placard at a rally for them without believing in the furtherance of struggle on the inside or destruction of prisons in general. We often see these cases reach towards the lowest common denominator of leftism to reach their goals.

Similarly, we feel frustrated with the process of defining who is or who isn't a political prisoner. This question, at its core, is trying to define who is or who isn't deserving of support—in many situations, a relatively fucked-up thing to ask. It puts some narrow definition of ‘anarchist’ or ‘radical’ above all other considerations. Does this person (or even worse, does this person's “crime”) show a direct connection

When we came out for breakfast (which breakfast was served in the day room of the cell house, just brought over from the kitchen to be heated up there), you could hear the discontent. There was a lot of yelling, a lot of slurs being thrown out, so much so that the guards came over and said, “You all better keep it down or we gonna go on lockdown.” Well, the prisoners didn't do nothing, they went back in there like it was nothing. I remember, cause I was frustrated too. But we just went back to our cells and just continued the regular routine in prison.

And then when we came out for afternoon rec (which would've been like 1 or 2 pm I believe), the same CO that had gone around waking everybody up that morning was shaking down a white prisoner by the name of [*Prisoner D*]. And I heard this prisoner saying to her, “Why you shaking me down, why you keep fucking with us, you don't have anything better to do? Why don't you just go home? Why are you so miserable?” And some other prisoners had a talk with him, telling him that they're on some really petty shit today, maybe you should just calm down and let it go. But he wasn't having it, he was being real adamant about his rights, which I understand completely. I mean, they were going into his cell, rifling through his property for nothing. And so he kept his indignant stance, and we all understood it. And so the doors opened for rec, we went out to the yard and did our routine, working out and such. And less than 20 minutes into rec, we saw that same prisoner being drug by a group of officers, all beat up and bloodied, looked like he was only semi-conscious.

And that really sparked a lot of anger, collective anger stemming from what this CO had done already today and from all of the oppressive maneuvers of lock down for petty shit that we had gone through lately. It really brought that collective anger together. And even though [*Prisoner D*] was a Caucasian prisoner, you had lots of African American prisoners, Latino prisoners who were really feeling his plight for what they had done to him. There became this sort of consensus amongst these different racial groups, on the yard that we had to come together. We got together and we talked about it, but nothing really happened. And honestly, I was with it, I was angry and ready to go and get these

However, in the last 5 years, you got all these new things popping up like Facebook. Facebook is a phenomenal establishment for social networking. Right now it's up to roughly 750 million people, and it's growing everyday. And because of these social networks, with technology evolving and society evolving, people are so caught up in this "interneting" and texting and such, and people no longer wanna write and connect up. They don't want to make genuine connections with anybody, let alone a lowly person in prison.

So for the people who are out there in society, really fighting for prison reform or humanity in prison in general, when they reach out to prisoners in a real way, it's a really powerful thing. You know, once a prisoner gets to thinking that there's nobody out there on the outside, it's really easy for him to become unmotivated. So it's very, very important that the supports on the outside come together and make personal connections with the prisoners. Only then will the prisoner begin to feel connected to something larger, to the world, and vis-versa for the supporter in regards to the prison. Without that, support is nothing. And that's what I'm feeling nowadays, the deterioration of those types of relationships between supporters, activist organizations and prisoners. The last decade, it's really been going under.

O: Can you describe some specific moments of rupture that you've experienced, perhaps the uprising in Wabash Valley in 2001?

I: Well, on August 21st 2001, ironically Black August as George Jackson has become synonymous with, there was a riot that happened at Wabash Valley. The catalyst for this riot was this correctional officer who came in early, doing her shift, doing her walk. And prisoners had taped over the light and taped over the windows, just so they could have enough darkness to go to sleep. And she came through banging on every door in G-cell house, G-left cell house, yelling at everybody to take that shit down. In this cell house, there were approximately 88 prisoners in each side. And she went to each and every cell, all 44 cells, and woke everyone up.

to the politics that we or our groups espouse? No? Well, this person isn't worth our time then. (This is of course a cold simplification of the process, but it's nonetheless real). This is problematic: when we decide who to support by deciding whether their original crime was committed out of a political ideology we think we share, then all prisoners who don't meet our criteria, no matter what their current politics or engagement with struggle within any given prison, are left without any level of material support or solidarity by action. This robs us of any relevance to prison struggle, and makes our passionate words about solidarity into a cruel joke.

On the other end from this individualization, this marking off of a certain individual or classes of prisoners for support, we find those groups and organizations that offer blanket support in the form of a-political material resources, given freely to all that ask. This is obviously important in myriad ways: people gotta read, people gotta eat. But these groups almost always demand, structurally as a group, a strict adherence to non-intervention—that is, non-engagement with the prisoners beyond the surface level of the fulfillment of a social service. It comes down to only filling packages and mailing resources. There's not room for relationship building, there's not room for discussion and certainly not for collaboration.

What this solidarity does is to externalize, to privatize some of those necessary aspects of human incarceration that the state has long sense abandoned. Being complicit in, being an active member of the continuation of the prison system is the opposite of what radical solidarity should mean. Yes, it makes prison more comfortable for people, but at the end of the day, a comfortable prison is still a prison. We are frustrated with the shortsighted, charity-based activism embedded in the practice of not making the tough choices of what to send out, what to distribute, how to relate to people and how to build long-lasting relationships.

This all being said, it should be noted that we do indeed believe that all prisoners, all captives of the state, deserve our support in their efforts to struggle, to rebel against their captors, against their conditions,

in furtherance of destruction of the prison system. We see this as a simultaneous move away from and synthesis of the aforementioned present day forms of prisoner solidarity. That is, we want to support everyone, to engage with everyone on the level of radical struggle against prisons, aiding and abetting and taking part ourselves in those actions which move concretely towards the fall of the prison walls. (It should be obvious that we retain our agency to not work with a particular person, basing that decision on our interactions with them rather than on what the state claims about them.)

As a reflection of that sentiment and in a move away from the language of individualization/collectivization, we refer to all politically active prisoners as “prison rebels.” What we want, what we try to work towards daily, what we dream about and talk about here in the free world, is the complete destruction of the prison-industrial complex. We want to connect with and support everyone on the inside who, in whatever way they’re able and willing, thinks or dreams or acts towards that as well.

As the people in this project not currently behind bars, we feel a deep personal need to move past the futility of unpaid social work that serves only to recuperate, against being only a line on an insurance claim (you know, solidarity through broken windows and shit), past the awkwardness of pretending race, class, gender and ideological differences don’t exist between us. We intend instead to work towards uncovering a common practice between us, something sound enough to create the acts of solidarity that will make prison guards everywhere shiver—a hatred of prison strong enough to exist as a real social force.

This is how we start again.

O: What are some of the other factors that have led to or facilitated this culture of docility amongst prisoners?

I: I think one of the biggest factors in this regard came in when they switched up, switched back the level classification of prisons. You know, prisoners in Level 4 being in with prisoners in Level 2 and 3. Now you have prisoners that have 3-5 years to go home in the same place, on the same range, as people who are serving life! When you got prisoners who are gonna go home, their interests are different from someone who’s never gonna go home. They be like “Hey, whoa, hold up, I ain’t gonna get involved in any of that, I’m gonna go home.” And that simple dynamic has undermined a lot of the potential resistance that could have occurred over the last 10 years. That is one of the biggest factors.

But recently they started mixing the Level 4 back together, Level 3s and 2s back together. So this’ll be a testament to this idea, to see if when you get a concentration of guys doing a lot of time in the same place, if the levels of struggle and solidarity come back too. Because they know, “We’re here for the long haul, we gotta set the tone. If we let them do us like this, they just gonna run us over forever.” But when you had the other guys in the mix, it really undermined the whole process of solidarity and consolidating each other’s efforts to stop some of this oppression.

O: What role do you see outside supporters playing in efforts to either join in struggle or aid prisoners in coming together or communicating with each other?

I: I think it’s very, very significant, it’s a simple aspect, but it’s a profound one also. When you got people in society who are watching, who are aiding and assisting prison resistance, it makes the struggle of inmates more validated in the eyes of the prison administration, and has effects on the whole PIC. Also, this helps motivate the prisoner himself, because he feels like there’s somebody out there that really cares, and that’s a big thing!

might get a group of guys who campaign and get together to write the commissioner. For instance, me and [Prisoners A & B] had put together a letter writing campaign to the warden to get them to turn on the heat in the SHU, as they were trying to freeze us out. But beyond that sort of stuff, it's nothing. There's not any resistance here anymore!

It's a whole different type of prisoner these days. And it's not necessarily the prisoners' fault either, not like it's a different breed of person or something innate to them; it's the way the system has responded to them. Here in Indiana, we got this prisoner named [Prisoner C] who has been made a precedent, because he spoke out against the conditions in the 80s; he was outspoken and he even came to the point of an uprising. His fellow comrade was in trouble, the police was harassing him, down in Pendleton, and he came to his comrade's defense, and it sparked an uprising.

As a result of this, that the administration put him in solitary confinement, and they kept him there since 1985! 26 years in solitary confinement! He's the message to the other prisoners: "You don't wanna get together, you don't wanna have solidarity with each other, cause if you do, we gonna do you like we did [Prisoner C], we're gonna keep you in solitary confinement for years." And right now they playing me as the new precedent, you know, talking like, "Look what they did to [interviewee] man, they put him in the SHU for 10 years for doing nothing! But, you know, he was back there being an activist, talking that radical stuff, that's why they kept him there."

This is what's on guys' minds these days, because of these precedents of locking people up in solitary for so long. Even today as I write this to you about this subject, here at Pendleton Correctional Facility, these people are being treated the worst, but ain't no one speaking out... no one! It's becoming a new culture of docile prisoners, for real. It's a shame, because I sit here as a progressive prisoner and person, and I got to be careful not to be singled out, cause I know the administration is already watching me because of my activities. But, if it comes down to it, you have to take alternate measures to be an activist.

timeline

Most of the points on this timeline deal with prison riots and/or hostage taking. This isn't to say that we believe these actions are the only or even the most effective manner in which prison struggles have been manifested in Indiana. This is, rather simply, a reflection of how information about prisoner struggles gets disseminated to those on the outside. It's difficult, if not impossible, to catalog the myriad daily subversive activities in which prisoners engage in defiance of their conditions; this is not information known to the outside world, except to those of us who seek it out in our personal relationships with prisoners. The events on this timeline reflect what are seen by the mass media as the most egregious of ways in which prisoners fight back; we share them knowing full well that the fight happens every single day of every year.

This timeline was gathered from newspapers and personal sources. Old accounts were scanned and put online, many others were in online archives already. The race riots in which whites took the

lead are excluded from this account; while they're obviously worth remembering for a certain kind of historical perspective, we didn't want to come off as glorifying them.

1933: Ten prisoners associated with John Dillinger escaped from the ISP in Michigan City, IN; after receiving guns from the outside, they held a sheriff and several guards hostage during their attempt.

Later that year, Dillinger was arrested, then rescued from prison by his gang: "...on October 12, gang members converged on the jail where Dillinger was being held. Pierpont, Makley, and Russell Clark entered the facility, while Ed Shouse remained outside as a lookout. The three men confronted Sheriff Jesse Sarber—in the presence of Deputy Wilbur Sharp and Sarber's wife—and stated that they were from Indiana State Prison with a transfer request for John Dillinger. When the sheriff asked to see their credentials, Pierpont shot him in the abdomen. Makley and one other man then physically assaulted the sheriff, mortally injuring him. They locked the deputy and Sarber's wife in a cell and left Sarber for dead while they made their escape.

(Ellensburg Daily Record, Wikipedia, John Dillinger Museum)

1945: Riot and fire at Fort Benjamin Harrison disciplinary center. Two killed, one a prison guard; the fire was set in two different spots and destroyed nine barracks, then valued at 10,000. The riot, in which "several hundred" to 1,900 participated, was in reaction to extra duty imposed because of infractions against prison rules. Machine guns were fired by guards at inmates. (Youngstown Vindicator, St. Petersburg Times, Toronto Daily Star)

1953: Inmates of the Indiana State Reformatory (now known as Pendleton Correctional Facility) broke windows, burned mattresses and threw bedding in a day-long demonstration which neared riot proportions late in the day. (Baltimore Sun)

O: As an expansion of the previous question, were there outside influences or materials from the outside that you worked with extensively in your political education or, again, was it an internal process?

I: Well, honestly, while I was in population I had absolutely no contact with any progressive groups in society. No prison reform, no religious or no political groups; I didn't have any connection to them. However, I was introduced to some pamphlets written by fellow prisoners, some at Wabash Valley, who were putting it down against the death penalty, against the atrocities committed in lockup units, etc. I seen that stuff and that started to inspire me, for sure.

But by the time I got to lockup, I got exposed to more progressive, grassroots groups, different prison reform groups and I bumped into the Books Through Bars groups. Indiana Prisoner Voices, which is an old publication; I was reading a couple of those. And that sort of stuff kinda inspired me to keep growing. But for the most part, most of my political education came from some of the older prisoners I was around, who saw the potential in my thoughts and what I was trying to do with my case and helped me to see what was going on, what was at play.

Over the course of my time, since '99, there hasn't been no particular group, no outside group, with any influence. There's just bits and pieces here and there, with not much going on. Honestly, the folks in Bloomington and the stuff they've been doing have had, at least for me, the most profound impact in this time period. I mean, even Indiana C.U.R.E., they shoot stuff through, but it just don't connect with anybody, with the average prisoner who's living behind the walls of oppression everyday.

O: What sorts of ways did you or did you see people struggling against their conditions on a day-to-day basis?

I: Well, you know, you get people on the micro-level in Indiana prisons, you might get a group of guys who do a hunger strike or you

on, I realized that I was really in a very vulnerable place, cause what I wanted was an active discipline culture that resisted the PIC and the advancement of docile prisoner culture.

There was this scene in 2001 where there was a prison riot that erupted in Wabash Valley Correctional Facility. In this, blacks and whites and Latins were all on the same team because these guards were being so oppressive across the board. They were being so oppressive and controlling that it turned into a powder keg and it exploded in they face.

And this is when I realized I was vulnerable, that I was living in a glass house the whole time. When this happened, prisoners across the whole range were saying things while we were locked up like “Hey, you better tell em who done it, you better tell em, cause I ain’t gonna be on lockdown for nobody.” And the next day internal affairs came through doing interviews, and people started disappearing to the Secure Housing Unit. I start thinking of this breakdown, thinking to myself “Man, I’m in prison, this shit is REAL,” you know, where I come from, from the inner city with urban culture, you would think prison is real, in the hip-hop sense of “keeping it real.” And you think all these guys in prison are “keeping it real” to the realest, you know, some of the best of the best, survival of the fittest. But those illusions were shattered, cause these guys weren’t, it wasn’t real, they told on these guys.

And turns out I was lied on and made out to be part of this situation, and I ended up being carted off to the SHU also. And now on the SHU, it’s a different situation. I’m sitting here looking at the prison population and I didn’t get no love from population, nobody on the case really did, no one in population was standing up for us, trying to hype for us, doing stuff for us. Once we went to the SHU, we were out of sight out of mind, kinda like the rest of society treats prisoners in general. But, while on the SHU I met a bunch of prisoners who were more politically conscious, which is probably a result of the situation there, being able to read and write and talk to lots of like-minded people.

1956: In Pendleton, IN, tower guards at the Indiana State Reformatory broke up a prison riot within 10 minutes by turning shotguns on the rioters, wounding eight inmates and one prison guard who was held as a hostage. (Chicago Tribune)

1963: In Putnamville, IN, 500 rioted over the death of an inmate and to get drugs from the infirmary; the riot broken up by state troopers using birdshot in shotguns. Seven inmates were injured, two escaped. (Fort Scott Tribune)

1966: Politicians openly joke about the frequency of riots in Indiana prisons, specifically the Girls’ School. (Rochester Sentinel)

1966: 25 inmates rioted and set a fire at the Indiana State Prison in Michigan City, smashing tables and burning down part of the store house. The warden was struck in the head when he tried to intervene in the uprising. (Reading Eagle)

1968: Two guards held hostage by 20 prisoners at Michigan City who wanted to voice complaints about their conditions. They were permitted to talk to reporters, then released the guards unharmed after 6.5 hours. (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette)

1969: Pendleton, IN: One prisoner (black) shot dead and 46 wounded after guards opened fire on rioters in a recreation yard of the Indiana State Reformatory. Guards said the riot had “racial overtones.” 15 of the wounded were hospitalized. (St. Petersburg Times)

1973: Three hostages were held in a prison riot; three cellblocks were seized and ten demands were pressed by Indiana convicts. The cellblocks seized held 900 out of the 1,500 inmates housed in the prison. The takeover was possibly in solidarity with four inmates put in solitary after a stabbing. The demands partially concerned changes in mail, food, visiting privileges, and disciplinary procedures, as well as “an end to blatant racism.” (Press-Courier, Palm Beach Post)

1975: Two prisoners armed with homemade knives took eight prison employees hostage for five hours. A few days later, two prisoners overwhelmed two guards in the Indiana State Prison and escaped. They took three hostages, including the warden and his wife, but were arrested shortly afterwards. (Leader-Post)

1979: 27 inmates at the Indiana State Prison had a four-day hunger strike to demand hot water, medical care, and a general improvement in conditions. Their demands were ignored. A week later prisoners took three guards hostage, using broken broomsticks and a table leg, to press the same demands, but the hostages were eventually released unharmed. Up to 75 people were involved in the disturbance. (Toledo Blade)

1980: There was a 16 hour uprising in Indiana State Prison, which ended without incident after officials agreed to listen to inmate complaints. 35 inmates took seven hostages in one part of the building; a second group of 350 inmates barricaded themselves into Cellblock C. 120 state troopers took Cellblock C without incident after the first group negotiated and released their hostages. The demands included better medical care, individual review of the cases of the prisoners in the security lockup and better news coverage of the prison. State Senator John Larson, while commenting on the riot, said that four previous riots and demonstrations at the prison since 1973 had centered on too little heat, hot water, medical attention, fire safety and recreation. (Lakeland Ledger, Montreal Gazette)

1985: At Pendleton Indiana State Reformatory, a prisoner named Lincoln Love was badly beaten by guards, who also used tear gas in the cellblock. In response, two inmates, John Cole and Christopher Trotter, fought the guards who beat Love, stabbing two. They also fought guards in the infirmary, where Love had been taken, then held three staff members hostage in a cellblock for 17 hours. 6 guards were hospitalized with stab wounds; four were in critical condition. The standoff ended

You know, the prison code with the Convict and the Inmate, which are analogous to the Field Slave and House Slave. These cats, the ones reaching to me, they definitely was convicts. It didn't matter if you were white or Black, it was about being a convict, about coming together because we had a common enemy, the prisoncrat, the warden, the people actively oppressing you. That was the culture I came into. So, it was a little bit of both, a little bit of me having the individual drive, mostly because of my case, and a little bit of the residues of that convict consciousness culture that embraced me.

O: So as you're starting to talk about it here, I'm curious of what the political climate was like in the late 90s/early 00s as you experienced it, and how it has changed over the past 12 or 13 years.

I: Wow, so yeah, entering the system in '98 up till now, it's definitely a different prison now. The biggest undermining factor to the culture that existed back then is capitalism, is the growth of the PIC. It really started extending itself to different corporations for money gain, for profit. What really changed the mentality then was coming in there were these residues, and I say residues specifically, of the 80s and 90s solidarity amongst prisoners when dealing with the prison administration.

So what happened was the proliferation of lock-up units. And I didn't know this at the time, but 'rades like [*Ed: list of prisoners' names omitted.*]... They created these places like the MCC and the SHU to suppress the political and social progressive consciousness prisoners had. And so they being suppressed, and by the time I came in in '99, I could only see small residues of this mentality.

You know, I would see some things, like we would have a temporary boycott of the commissary when they raise the prices or we'd stop using the phone for a week or something. And even though these actions were defeated because of this lack of discipline, this still was something, and there were some demonstrations that were successful. As time went on, and as I looked at what was going

me different materials and such that I wasn't accustomed to, like books different books on culture and politics, particularly from a black liberation standpoint. Even though I was still in conflict with these ideas, cause I was a lumpen like I told you, I began slowly to engage with and embrace these ideas as they related to my own situation.

And when it came down to it, the conflict I was having was that I didn't want to believe, at first, that it was racial politics that were at play in my case. But after a while, I was exposed to certain materials that showed the racialized ways the system work, and I began to see my case in that light.

After a while I was introduced to the economics too, Karl Marx and Adam Smith and the other prominent economists and sociologists, so to speak. I began to understand that the racism wasn't really about pure hatred, that it's about economics, about resources and wealth. And this is when I began to see how my situation was brought forth. You know, I was a lumpen, I was just like cattle or something, just a number, going through the line and being fed into this thing called the Prison-Industrial Complex (PIC). I was just fresh slop in the trough for the PIC.

O: Did you feel supported, did you find people to help you along in this process of learning, or was it a necessarily individual process given the conditions?

I: Well, I think the process can function in two regards. One, if you got that idea that you wanna learn, you got the bug so to speak, you will go out and find the information. Secondly, the information will start coming to you. I mean, I would approach these more conscious brothers for information. Eventually they just started leaving materials on my bed, books and such. So that was a supportive group, there.

But, for the most part, coming to prison in 1999, that prison culture had a lot of residue from stuff that happened in the 80s and 90s.

when Department of Corrections agreed to the 22 demands of the prisoners, including an FBI investigation into abuse by guards, establishing a grievance committee, setting minimum wages for inmates, allowing prisoners to be politically active without intimidation or reprisals and ending censorship of all letters, magazines, and newspapers. At least 100 inmates participated in what reporters described as a "full-scale riot". Some of the principle instigators in these actions have spent the last 25 years in solitary confinement isolation units. (Milwaukee Journal, Wikipedia, The Bulletin)

1986: A group of inmates in Cellblock C of the Indiana State Prison in Michigan City, IN, refused to leave when asked, instead taking control of the area. They held three guards hostage for five hours. Concussion bombs and warning shots were used against them; four guards, two inmates and two "rescuers" were injured. Officials decided to use force because inmates were making "unreasonable" demands and were unwilling to negotiate. According to the Deseret News, "The incident came just a month after three other prison employees were held by 14 death row inmates complaining about overcrowded conditions at the prison. The hostages were released after 12 hours when the prisoners were allowed to broadcast their complaints. A woman reporter from the La-Porte, IN Herald-Argus was allowed inside the prison to hear the inmates' complaints about two condemned men having to live in each 9 1/2-by-11 cell." (Toledo Blade, Deseret News)

1987: Inmates stab seven guards and hold three employees hostage for 17 hours at the Indiana Reformatory. The riot begins after one inmate is beaten by guards for refusing to vacate his cell during a weapons shakedown, and tear gas is used in the cell block.

1989: Reception Diagnostic Center, Plainfield, disturbance. "Offenders take over cell house. Situation resolved by tactical intervention. Emergency squads used chemical agents." (IDOC)

1991: Plainfield Correctional Facility, disturbance. “Offenders take over the recreation field. Situation resolved by negotiations.” (IDOC)

1991: Prisoners in the MCC at Westville went on hunger strike to expose their conditions: 23 ½ hours of cell time a day, extremely cold temperatures, denial of mail, constant bright lighting of cells, and severely restricted visitations. The announced minimum stay in the unit was three years. Four of the prisoners continued the strike for 37 days, eating only after prison officials obtained a court order allowing them to force-feed the prisoners. The hunger strikes continued intermittently, one prisoner cutting off the tip of his finger in protest. In response, guards brutally beat the prisoners while they were shackled, left prisoners in isolation wearing only underwear, and prevented their lawyers from visiting them. (New York Times)

1992: Correctional Industrial Facility, hostage taking. One offender takes one staff member hostage. Situation ends when offender is shot by Special Emergency Response Team marksman.” (IDOC)

1992: MCC prisoners file over 3,000 grievances in 20 months. They also conduct numerous hunger strikes and even amputate body parts in protest, one prisoner mailing his finger to a civil liberties organization. This was partly in an attempt to raise attention around the class action lawsuit filed by prisoners against the DOC for human rights violations; after two years, the attorneys settled out of court against the will of the prisoners involved. (Human Rights Held Hostage)

1993: Human Rights Held Hostage, a Indiana prisoner newsletter, launched. Its stated purpose was to “expose the conditions within Indiana prisons, push for changes in these conditions, and articulate/propagate the views and interests of prisoners in general and the revolutionary class of prisoners in particular.”

wrong, you know, my rap idols are talking about it. But when it came down to it, I just had to deal with society, with my life.

So you see, these seeds were in my head already but I wasn’t able to act on them. I was just living life, caught in a subculture of capitalism. Eventually through that, I ended up being caught for a crime I didn’t commit. So I think that’s really where the biggest catalyst for my political consciousness came from. Cause I’m like “Damn, I’m in a situation, in a trial before coming to prison, for a crime I didn’t commit” and I start looking at the politics and the policies, and I start to realize how the three branches of government actually work.

So, I entered the prison doors, after being falsely convicted, and my political consciousness had already been sparked. And I was listening now; I was listening and looking, looking for answers and solutions, stemming from my own situation. So I guess it’s true when they say that people don’t accept resolutions until they show up on their doorstep. And I’m a good example of that, in my development and thinking.

O: Once you entered prison, then, and you were looking for these things or more aware of these things, what sort of political atmosphere, positive and negative, did you encounter?

I: When I first got on the inside, I’m searching, I’m looking for everything, I’m hungry. And at first, my springboard to learning was that hip-hop side. You know, I was listening to Tupac and he’d say something about Machiavelli and I’d think “Who is Machiavelli?” So, I’d go and I’d read it, I’d learn about it. Then I’d move on, I’d read Sun Tzu or something.

Then I’d bump into other prisoners who were conscious, and they would really cling to me because even though I was fresh from the street and didn’t have no formal education or college, I could retain information and talk about what I had read in a real organized and clear fashion. And so they were really gravitating to me, showing

interview with a comrade in population

O: What was your state of mind or political stance when you first entered prison?

I: Well when I first entered prison, I was a lumpen. That's a Marxist term for a person that really wasn't concerned with the political atmosphere or things of that nature. I mean, I really didn't care about that stuff. I guess when it came down to it, I was living like an artisan, working off of the barter system, getting lost in one of the subcultures of capitalism. But, I would lean to the left on different issues if you asked me directly. I knew something was wrong, but I couldn't articulate and I didn't really care to. I was against the Ronald Reagans and George Bush Seniors, and stuff like that that was affecting the American urban communities.

O: What was the process of your politicization like?

I: Prior to my incarceration, I grew up in a household where reading was a requirement of my step-father and mother, so I used to read a lot. My step-father—I wouldn't say he was a super political dude, but he had his views, particularly in the black power movement, looking at figures like Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. This sort of gave me an idea to start with. As well, growing up in the Flint, Michigan and Detroit areas, there was a level of political consciousness in the air, whether you wanted to engage it or not. And obviously, I guess, at 22 when I came to prison I had chosen not to engage with it.

And then it was hip-hop, early 80s hip-hop. You had "Fight the Power", you know, Public Enemy; you had Ice Cube that came out in the late 80s with America's Most Wanted, and he said lines like "They wanna sweep brothers like me up under the rug/ kicking shit called street knowledge/ why more niggas in the pen than in college?/ Now cause of that line I might be your cellmate/ and that's from the nigga ya love to hate." And so I can see there's something

It also planned to do support campaigns, fundraising, make lawyers available, and specifically serve New Afrikan prisoners. It wanted to facilitate communication between prisons and work to create a statewide movement. At least eight issues were published. (Human Rights Held Hostage)

1994: Wabash Valley Correctional Facility, hostage taking. "Offender takes hostage in medical unit using a pen. Situation resolved by negotiations." (IDOC)

1999: 35 prisoners go on hunger strike at MCC Westville to protest police brutality, poor medical care, illegal conviction by the hearing committee, overt racism by white staff, food being tampered with by staff as retaliation, lack of access to the law library, and lack of nutritious food. (prisoncensorship.info)

2001: Hundreds of inmates from Indiana riot at a private prison in Floyd County in southeastern Kentucky, tossing sinks out of windows and burning their bedding. All Hoosier inmates were later moved out of the facility, although the IDOC claimed there was no connection between the riot and the decision to move. (AP, Lexington Herald)

2001: Riot at Westville Correctional Facility. "Two staff members barricaded themselves in the officer's restroom of the control pod when offenders took over the housing unit. 102 inmates are said to have participated." (IDOC)

2001: Eight "terrorist detainees" went on hunger strike to protest their detention by INS in an Indiana detention center.

2003: Disturbance at Indiana State Prison; "offenders refused to lock down on ranges. It was resolved by "tactical intervention", emergency squads using chemical agents." (IDOC)

2004: The Pendleton Correctional Facility is put on lockdown for five months after officials learn of inmates' plans for assaults and

escape attempts, as well as plans for boycotting recreation periods on some days, submitting grievances about food portions, visitation privileges and law library access, and picking days when everyone in a cell house would show up for breakfast, which is optional. (Wikipedia)

2004: Indiana Death Row inmates, relocated from Michigan City to Westville while the Death Row in Michigan City was renovated, go on hunger strike for two weeks to protest the “filthy and inhumane” conditions they were forced to endure at Westville.

2007: Newcastle private prison revolt: inmates from Arizona, picked for being nonviolent and compliant, refused to wear prison smocks as sign of rebellion against being moved from Arizona; a guard tried to cuff three of them and was severely beaten. 500 inmates participated in the riot.

Inmates set fire to mattresses and paper in the courtyard, destroyed furniture and windows and armed themselves with clubs before the prison was secured, officials said.” (Indianapolis Star)

DOC’s analysis: http://www.in.gov/indcorrection/news/NCCF_Post_Event_Report_Letterhead_5-23-07.pdf

2009: Three prisoners escaped the ISP in Michigan City, using tunnels under the prison grounds. (WishTV)

2011: Prisoners in the Secure Housing Unit of Wabash Valley Correctional Facility stage a multi-day protest in response to the continuance of a month long total system lockdown. Ranges were flooded, security cameras covered up and guard stations pummeled with feces and urine.

the longest recorded hunger strike in modern history. We generated so much publicity and notoriety. As a result of this hunger strike, the A.C.L.U. was embarrassed and forced to represent us in a class action lawsuit challenging our conditions of confinement at WCU.

To sum this up, over the past 30 years, whatever daring militant acts of protest activity challenging prisoners’ conditions of confinement were organized by Black prisoners. However, during the hunger strike in particular, white prisoners such as [*Ed: list of prisoners’ names omitted*] demonstrated their mettle.

of prisoners couldn't drink it. The consensus among the majority of us on WCU was that the conditions were odious and oppressive and needed to be challenged, but how that could be done wasn't yet clear.

In August of 1991, after discussing various options, I and [Ed: list of prisoners' names omitted] decided that the best way to draw attention to our plight was to go on a hunger strike. But, before we began starving our bodies, we had to first notify our family members and friends so they could help explain to the media and print why we were doing what we did. [Prisoner K] deserves the majority of the credit for organizing our hunger strike because he was the one who coordinated the inside actions with the outside support.

On September 23, 1991, sixteen of us went on a hunger strike. Seven of the guys only went on a one day strike to show solidarity. But I and [Ed: list of prisoners' names omitted] verbally committed ourselves for at least 2 weeks.

The director, Charles Wright (who we referred to as Charley Wrong), didn't take us seriously. As a matter of fact, he went around to the the cells and told [Prisoner L] to his face that he'd be the first one to crack. He told [Prisoner L] that he wouldn't even last a week. Charley Wrong's words actually motivated [Prisoner L] to do something he had no idea he was capable of doing. Our hunger strike was supported by outside organizations such as the Alkebu Lan Umoja Institute out of Fort Wayne, the Indiana Coalition for Human Rights, and the Interdenominational Minister Alliance, etc.

After 14 days, [Prisoner M] came off his hunger strike. I came off after 18 days (because I had/have allergic reactions to the water, I was forced to drink milk to stay hydrated, and so technically I was consuming nutrients); [Prisoner N] came off his strike after 20 days, [Prisoners O & P] ended their strikes after 30 days. At that point, the prisoncrats were forced to go to the courts and get orders of temporary guardianship which would have allowed them to force feed intravenously and nasally the remaining four hunger strikers. After 37 days, [Ed: list of prisoners' names omitted] ended their hunger strike as well. At the time, 37 days was

Conducting interviews with people in prison is difficult; especially so when those people are targeted political prisoners spending their time in supermax lockup units. There are the obvious problems with prison censors and other administration whose sole aim is to disrupt honest communication between people on the inside and outside, to destroy possibilities of collaboration, to maintain control over the situation. They present real constraints on what is or isn't possible and are, for many people for very legitimate reasons, a force not to be messed with. But there are, of course, ways to subvert censors, to build ties and relationships where honest communication of ideas is possible.

There is, as well, the added factor of the position of the interviewee in relation to the interviewer, particularly pertaining to access to ideas and outlets for our own expression. In our respective positions we both have things to say, we both have things we want to get out, to communicate. These transcripts, however, are hopefully

not about the political position of the interviewer, but rather the voice of the prisoner. The questions are short and simple, in a concerted effort to let the experience and analysis of the prisoners come through in its full force. We'll save our own opinions for separate writings.

These interviews were conducted throughout 2011 and are, we think, examples of successful attempts at reaching each other, at trying to communicate fully. They represent a momentary culmination of personal relationships and testify to the possibilities that exist when we start to reach out and build networks of communication and solidarity, not based on political affiliation or personal fulfillment, but rather the common drive to push struggle against prisons to new levels. The interviews represent varied experiences and opinions, and deal with both historical explanations stretching over the previous three decades as well as present day analyses.

We have removed names mentioned by the interviewees and replaced them with markers such as [Prisoner A].

interview with a comrade in supermax lockup

Outside Interviewer(O): Can you describe your early years in prison and the process of your politicization?

Inside Interviewee(I): I first went to prison at the age of 16 in 1983. Burglary gone wrong; someone was home. I was with two other guys, white guys, friends of mine, in an all white neighborhood. And you know, we was just kids, out drinkin', gettin' high, tryin' to score. When we got there, opened the door, the guy was a gun collector, lots of guns that kind of stuff. A shootout ensued, the homeowner was injured, seriously injured, and I was given 30 years for attempted robbery. My codefendant was given 30 years. The other two guys who were in the car were given different charges, were given deals. I was moved over to adult court, at the age of 16. And I was given a 30 year sentence, and

Reformatory. After 17 hours, an agreement was reached: we were to release the hostages and submit a list of cases to be investigated by the U.S. Justice Department. The feds did interview the cases but they didn't pursue the criminal prosecution of any one. The injured prisoner won a \$50,000 settlement as a result of his civil rights being violated.

In June of 1991, I was transferred from I.S.P to the new Westville Control Unit (WCU), aka the Maximum Control Complex (MCC). Although the unit had a capacity to house 224 prisoners, when I arrived there were only 35 of us all together. WCU had officially opened in April of 1991, and was designed to mimic the U.S. Federal Penitentiary Super Max Unit in Marion, Illinois.

I and the other 34 prisoners assigned to WCU were supposed to be the worst of the worst—but were we really? If the truth be told, the prisoncrats and their agents really label us as being the most predatory and dangerous prisoners in the system to justify holding us at WCU. Some of us were assigned there for filing lawsuits, identifying with revolutionary politics, or our belief in non-Christian religions. Others were assigned for other vindictive purposes.

On a routine basis, we were treated inhumanely. For instance, upon our arrival we were subject to solitary confinement for extended periods of time, kept alone in our cells with minimal contact with other prisoners or the outside world. There were no visits from our family and friends for the first 90 days, no radio or TV privileges, our bed had to be made by 8am every morning, etc. If not, we were stripped out. What we read was censored by the director of the WCU. We were not permitted to holler from cell to cell. Most of the restrictions imposed on us were petty and irrational.

The security measures were extreme and over-exaggerated. For instance, it was a requirement that our person be searched when we came out of our cell for recreation and shower. The searches we endured were actually molestation. A lot of prisoners were so humiliated by this act, that they refused to come out of their cells for recreation or showers. To add insult to injury, the water at WCU was so toxic that a lot

Finally, after 15 hours, the the authorities issued an ultimatum for the release of the hostages.

So, understanding the history of the prisoncrats' vicious nature, and having played the drama out to the brink, under the threat of a blood-bath, we released the remaining hostages. We only managed to secure agreement that the prisoncrats would deal with our list of grievances seriously in the immediate weeks to follow.

On February 1, 1985 at Indiana Reformatory (Pendleton), a group of prisoners [Ed: list of prisoners' names omitted] who were housed on Maximum Restraint Unit (M.R.U.) began to protest, refusing to come out of their cells, due to the unreasonable and unnecessary daily early morning shakedowns. In response to their protest, a "goon squad" was dispatched to the unit and in the process of enforcing their will upon the protesters, they singled out [Prisoner J] and stomped, kicked and clubbed him. The majority of his brutalization took place after he was shackled and handcuffed.

They beat him so viciously that they cracked an illegally issued oak club on him. After beating him into a bloody pulp and a state of unconsciousness, they dragged him up and down the range for the prisoners to see. Then they told each prisoner that they were next. In the midst of this terror and mayhem, some of the prisoners of the unit yelled distress calls out of their cell windows at the passing prisoners in general population.

Shortly thereafter, I and [Ed: list of prisoners' names omitted] went to the captain's office and demanded that we be allowed to see the injured prisoner. The captain refused to reason with us, and instead sprayed us with mace. In response, we stabbed several guards. Some of the guards who were stabbed were critically wounded out of necessity.

We then proceeded to J-cell house, where we took guards as hostages, therein as self-protection. After barricading ourselves, we then contacted the press and entered into negotiations with the prisoncrats. The main issue of course was the history of brutality at Indiana

so in '83 I was handed over to the Department of Corrections, a 16 years kid with a 30 year sentence. I was naive, under the notion that I was getting ready to get helped. I was getting ready to go to prison, to change and learn and better myself for society. I say that in the context of the mainstream ideology that prison was to help me, with counselors and so forth and so on--and that was just not the case.

The first place I went to was Westville Correctional Facility, in Westville, Indiana, which was more so dormitory style housing. More of a youthful population, but you had guys with life sentences and guys that had been down 10, 15, 20 years. In matter of fact, it used to be partly coed, they used to have women there as well. Before that, it used to be a mental facility. You know, they still had dorms that housed so called mentally ill prisoners or what have you. Most of these guys was on drugs; it was common to see them walking the halls in a zombie like state. It was common to see them walking down the halls, down what we called the tunnels, cause they was underground, with leather padded restraints so they couldn't make a fist.

So, when I came in, I was part of an organization, a gang, what they called GD, a soldier, and I claimed my affiliation at the time. Most of the guys I came down with were my age group, they were GD too. So we bonded, we clicked. Everybody found someone they compatible with, bonded over common oppression, you know. Back then, we were just young, wild and misguided, that's all I can say to sum it up. And the COs, their attitude was aggressive. That was my first time with the overly aggressive, authoritative pig. We went through orientation and they would talk to us like we was nothin', you know, and that kinda set the tone for my incarceration. As a matter of fact, the guys that I came through with, we got into [it] with the COs out the gate. Basically demanded a certain amount of respect, and stripped away the legitimacy of the pig and the consular at the time...

Back then, there was a lot of reactionary violence, racial violence, where a lot of the white guys, if they didn't fight back, they was victims. It was like the predatory violence, know what I'm sayin'. The strong survive and the weak don't. And guys was getting raped, young

guys getting tricked into predatory relationships. There was the gang bangin' and extortin', you know, I went through all that, I was a predator . You know, back then even though you wasn't gang affiliated, you represented your city. You know, Gary, South Bend, Indianapolis, Fort Wayne. And even today, you know, back then Indianapolis and Gary would be like the powers of the Indiana Department of Corrections. It's like Russia and the United States. So even those who had organizational affiliations, or gang affiliations, most people would roll with they cities. So when you had confrontations, it would be like Gary and South Bend... In matter of fact, that was one of the first riots I saw, was Gary and South Bend in 1984, on New Year's Eve as a matter of fact.

To make a long story short, I ended up being transferred to the State Prison [in Michigan City, Indiana]. I was sick in bed. Of course, back then you had to be out of bed by 8 o'clock for count. You couldn't go back to bed [until] after 2 o'clock. Something was wrong, my side was hurting and I was trying to get medical attention. They were refusing. I went back to bed, they came back to try to get me out of bed. And so I told my comrade, we about to get up and whup this CO's ass. I'd had enough with informants and what have you, and that's what we did, when the guy came down to get me up, I just got up and whupped his ass, and a couple of snitches. And I went to the hole, and then got transferred to the State Prison. You know, I was 17, so I would've been there 8 months, 9 months, and transferred to Michigan City Prison, where they got death row. You know, it's the big house.

And coming in as a 17 year old kid, man, and seeing the walls. They had just murdered a guy up there, from Gary, in his cell. The administration had put a hit out on him and they killed him. And that shook up the whole Department of Corrections, you know, for the prisoners. When I got there, they were still on lockdown, and I had to go to the hole to do my hole time. I go up here and it was like a "little Beirut". There were demonstrations going on, fires going on, guys throwing whatever. People get pissed over spoiled milk or whatever. They put me in a cell, right next door to one of my folks, one of my GD brothers. He happened to be, at the time, the institutional coordinator. And

usually get lost in self-reflection, self-pity and lack of ability to adjust. This is usually the beginning of the end of them as broken men. Unless you know what you're fighting for, you regress with the depoliticization and disintegration of your personality.

Although I have been locked up 33 years, I try not to dwell on the time I've been imprisoned. Over the years, I have learned that time itself can be our most valuable asset. Just because I would rather be doing something else doesn't mean that there's nothing to do! Comrade Klaus Viehmann advised those of us confined on these units "not to obsess over being imprisoned. Live life! We don't miss life in prison, we just have a different one to lead, as we would have if any number of other things had happened instead of arrest. Use your life to read, write, study, learn on the basis of being free to do that. We (prisoners) can teach as well! Even if the interaction is restricted to authors and unsinkable writings, it is work and connection and valuable—Life!" (This isn't an exact quote, but it's the gist of what Klaus wanted to convey). I have understood all of this for years. Despite this, sometimes it feels good to hear other people clarify things that exist inside your own head.

Could you describe some specific events that you were involved in
O: over the years?

I: On April 27th, 1980, on a lock up unit at Indiana State Prison (Michigan City), eight other prisoners and I staged a takeover, capturing several guards and prison personnel. This incident was precipitated by some guards who had physically abused [*Prisoner I*] by pushing him down a flight of stairs while he was handcuffed, the day before. In an attempt to politicize and expose the abuse, we drew a list of grievances, notified the press, and entered into negotiations with top ranking officials for the IDOC.

In regards to our demands, the prisoncrats were adamant and unyielding. So, as the tensions of the stalemate built up, the state police were called in. Once at the prison, they were mobilized to surround the lock up unit, in full riot gear with guns at the ready.

from challenging the conditions of their confinement or getting involved in the struggle of human rights.

In the aftermath of our absence, the prisons became extremely repressive, so much so that prisoners tried to escape it by scrambling out of its way. In the past, prisoners have been able to scramble away from confronting oppressive realities. Sometimes this scrambling has been through some kind of chemically-induced form of escape, some cushy privileged job or through collaborating with the state. However, now that the prisons have become so repressive, the ability to scramble out of the way and not be directly affected by the repression has been immensely reduced.

For one, a vast number of jobs for prisoners have been cut. Unemployment of prisoners in Indiana is very high, over 60%. The ability to engage in narcotics trafficking and escape through some form of “high” is slowly being eradicated, as non-contact visits become institutionalized across the board and the state begins to police their own corrupt employees a little tighter. As K-9 units begin to patrol behind the walls and request for urine tests become more frequent, such practices become more detrimental. As weights, telephones, TVs and other privileges are taken, and even smoking is banned, prisoners cannot escape the repression. We are forced to face the music. We are forced to either tighten our belts or we are forced to capitulate to the state. It is slowly getting to the point where we are forced to either organize and fight back, or surrender and accept a very slow and torturous death.

I would be lying if I said that none of this affected me. It disturbed me a lot. However, I maintained my resolve by adopting the control unit survival strategies. This survival strategy emphasized that regardless of the circumstances in which I was confined, that I would continue to resist the prison authorities. If not physically, then mentally. I knew why I was resisting them, as well as the type of world I want to live in. Having some understanding enabled me to identify the prisoncrats and their agents as my enemies.

Those ‘rades who don’t remember exactly what the fight is about

he was like, “Brother, don’t eat that tray when they put that tray in there, we demonstrating.” And I was like “Psh, demonstrating what, we here in protective custody as prisoners, they feeding us this food.” So, you know, I was a little trigger happy, you know, didn’t want to be someone’s victim, you know. So I told the guy, when I get through eating, I’ll throw it out there. So I ate and threw the tray out. We got to throwing stuff, you know, that was actually the first time I got sprayed in the face with mace. It was for throwing toilet water on the unit team manager, administrator. It was my first baptismal fire, showing actual resistance to the pigs.

So I got sprayed in the face with mace; later they told me to rub some grease on your face before you start doin’ shit, not afterwards. [*Ed: our experience shows that putting any grease or lotion on your face will intensify the burn.*] But that was the order of the day on this unit, it was the lockup unit called the IVU. At that time we used to come out 10, 12 people at a time for an hour of recreation and a 15-20 min shower. And there was rampant violence, you know, violence could manifest at a moment’s notice, whether it was just the pigs, or guys refusing to return to their cells over a guy not getting medical attention or commissary or whatever. And there was a lot of prisoner on prisoner violence. So when you came out of your cell, you had to be alert, you had to be on your Ps and Qs, on your security. You know, that’s what I call today... that was boot camp training for us.

My thinking at the time was I was seeing lots of young guys, not necessarily victimized but exploited by the old heads, by the leadership of the organization. They was exploiting their sense of loyalty, making them do all kinds of backwards reactionary conduct. So I kinda moved in, and as youth we started organizing for ourselves and going in a different direction. And that kinda set the tone for me. I would go on demonstratin’, fightin’ the pigs, flooding, destroying cells, whatever, over whatever issue at the time. And at the time I had met some political prisoners, I had met [*Prisoner A*], who was on death row, [*Prisoner B*] and others who were protesting being doubled celled on death row. And they gave us literature to pass out, political materials of the time. They thought some seeds might take hold, but when you’re young

you're not really trying to hear that. You got a lot of time, so you just kinda on what you on; but they was practicing and were able to develop bonds between each other.

And I would eventually go to population, you know, getting adjusted to the politics. Trying to learn about my case, meeting other brothers... Even back then, I guess, it was all about economics, people was hustlin'. They were trying to live comfortable in prison, tryin' to have prison comforts, street comforts, or try to pay they lawyers or take care of home. Everybody had a hustle, and in order to get whatever, you had to scratch somebody's back or whatever. And that was the economy, that was the bartering system and the politics flowed around that. And then you had your different communities, and everybody was kinda cliquish within they groups, although they might have interacted, you know. And for me, like I said, back then I was just young and wild, not really doing no reading, just hustlin' and when necessary combatin' against the pigs.

Once you got identified they put you in what they called transit, where you would be moved joint to joint, institution to institution. And a lot of guys, who was older than me, who had been struggling within the system, brothers like [*Prisoner C*] who spearheaded rebellion in Pendleton in '85 or [*Prisoner D*] who was also a part of rebellion. They were political, they were being politicized, they were active, and they was settin' the tone on a lot of levels. And they would keep these guys housed, like they do us now, in these AS [administrative segregation] units. And so, as I was going into lockup, I started running into guys like this who had libraries. Back then you got to have 200-300 books, you know, pretty much on anything. They had these libraries on these units, and you locked down all day, you ain't got no TV, all you've got to do is read and exercise or whatever.

And that's what I did. I took advantage of those guys' libraries and started readin'. One of the first pieces I read that changed my life was George Jackson's *Soledad Brother*. And reading that book, reading George's words and looking out between these bars and seeing in reality was he was writing on paper, you know what I'm sayin,

a lot of young prisoners from identifying with revolutionary politics.

I defied the repressive prison forces by constantly agitating, educating and organizing resistance to the authority. Every cell house or lock up unit my comrades and I were placed in, we all lived in defiance of prison rules. To be honest, the majority of my comrades were guided by the cult of my personality, rather than a political line. This is to say, that they were anti-system, but if asked to define imperialism, colonialism, neocolonialism or forces of production, they couldn't do it.

These 'rades failure to develop an intellectually clear, political understanding of the system's nature of oppression and exploitation was undoubtedly responsible for them not making full-fledged conscious commitments to revolutionary struggle. Their commitments in prison were only an emotional reaction/addiction. This is to say, when people are operating out of the pain and miseries of their personal experiences, he/she has an underdeveloped concept of real revolution and social struggle.

What I mean is this: as long as one's personal pains and miseries are not attached to the concept of objective social justice and righteousness, then his/her revolutionary activity will be determined and dictated by the ups and downs of his/her psychological frame of mind, in relation to the degrees of pleasure and pain he/she experiences at given times.

This is why so many militants and radicals of the 60s transformed into corporate executives in the 70s. The civil rights bills and affirmative action programs relieved them of the social restrictions and forms of oppression that brought pain and misery into their personal lives. They stopped being militant and radical, even though America didn't stop being imperialist and capitalist.

After many of my comrades and I had been placed on A/S units, we tried to organize against repressive prison forces, but our efforts were to no avail... Those of us who had organized resistance in the past were snatched up and placed on Control Units. Our placement on these units intimidated prisoners in general. They were discouraged

prisoners by continuing their “tribal conflicts”.

At the same time, the prisons were being overrun with young gang bangers, there was an emergence, or re-emergence, of radical white supremacist ideas among young white prisoners. A lot of them subscribed to the ideology and philosophical thinking of white supremacist Shane Matthew and “The Order.” Thus they organized themselves accordingly. These reactionary white nationalists became, wittingly and unwittingly, the agents of the prisoncrats, aiding in the dismantling of everything we had built up over the years. They opposed us, and racially polarized the prison system. Of course, I don’t mean to imply that they were the only ones propagating racism, there were many others, but their ideas were outdated and couldn’t galvanize anyone. There were old guards such as “Happy Jack Walter”, who was the leader of the K.K.K. for a while, and “Big Mike Meisenheimer.”

To ensure that “tribalism” and “regionalism” would ultimately become entrenched amongst the prison population at I.S.P. and the Indiana Reformatory, in 1991 the prisoncrats had all those prisoners who were politically conscious and capable of organizing and unifying prisoner in general population and on the D/S units transferred to the Maximum Control Complex. [*Ed: this was the first incarnation of ‘supermax’ or ‘control units’ in Indiana prisons. Its name was changed to the Westville Control Unit, in an attempt to deflect lots of pressure from outside organizations about the treatment of prisoners in the MCC. There are now many ‘supermax’ lockups in Indiana, including the WCU, the Secured Housing Unit at Wabash Valley, and a brand new ‘supermax’ lockup at the private prison in Newcastle.*] We were all isolated and persecuted because of our moral, social and political views, a persecution that was (and continues to be) reminiscent of the McCarthy era.

We are considered to be subversives, and so our very existence is criminal. As far as the prisoncrats are concerned, prisoners who organize or attempt to organize other prisoners, or raise their consciousness, are viewed as interfering with the orderly running of the camps, and so they are not to be tolerated! The persecution that myself and many others have been subjected to in the past twenty-six years has deterred

that was a powerful thing, that was educational. It changed my life, man, it moved me in a different direction. A lot of my development centered around George’s ideologies. And once I started becoming politicized, I started doing the study groups and networking and so forth and so on.

O: Can you talk a little bit more about the study groups and the networking?

I: The groups were guys on the unit... the thing about the movement back in the day was we always had some type of programs going. On the units, we might have spelling contests, we might have just history programs, or what have you. The POW journals were really instrumental in transforming a lot of our criminal mentalities, and other political journals. And we would have tests on each journal, you know, multiple choice tests. And dudes would grade them, then pass out books to read or do book reports on or whatever. Back then, approved prisoner organizations, the Department of Corrections allowed prisoners to pretty much run them as long as they had a sponsor. Some of these groups, these organizations would run tournaments that was progressive in nature for those of us who were politically conscious.

Most of us guys on these units, we would do, you know, the library thing or the study group thing. Even during our recreation, you know, when we could be playing basketball or whatever, we would have study groups. It might be 10 guys, 15 guys, or whatever, and we out there dialogin’ and goin’ over the journals. And we developed political relationships. And really, for a lot of folks, for guys like myself, it was helpful for weeding out our cadre; finding the guys that was a little more committed, that was hungry, you know. And a lot of these guys who were former gang bangers, for lack of a better terminology, once they started understanding the nature of our oppression, the colonial contradiction, why our lives is like they is and why we feel so powerless, a lot of these guys made a qualitative leap and a commitment to a more radical and progressive politics. Putting together the pieces of that puzzle, you know. It’s really like

the concept of leaderless resistance, where each individual elevates themselves and really becomes cadre material.

And as you move around, there's the contaminatin' effect, and that's how a lot of political activity really manifested in Indiana. And the DOC really aided and assisted with the transit concept, because by moving us every 60, 80, 90 days or 6 months or whatever, from institution to institution, all they did was allowed us to spread the gospel.

O: What sort of a time period was this? This was the late 80s you're talking about?

I: Yeah, this was the mid to late 80s.

O: So how did this study group and consciousness-raising activities sort of lead into more...

I: More formal resistance? It's just like I said, and some guys will take issue with this, but I always like to say the prison itself is broke down into class contradictions, man. We have our own internal class contradictions. I mean, we all oppressed and we all captives or what have you, but there's a pecking order in terms of class. I mean, you got the guy who might not have a GED so he can't get certain jobs, or he don't have outside support or a family structure, he might not even have a TV in his cell or he living off the state, in terms of hygiene—whatever they give you. Then you got the guy with support out there, he's privileged in terms of material support and visits and so on. And then you got the guy that's just a hustler. He just in here doing his thing, whatever.

Then you got the political movements, that run along different political lines. You got the African Internationalist who embrace the African Socialist Party concept, you had the New Afrikan Independence movement, you had the Revolutionary Communist Party, guys that embrace the Bob Avakian line. And all these groups, while they're not hostile to each other, they're rotating in their own

1980s, A.P.S.P.'s line was predominant amongst most politically conscious prisoners. But this was short lived because in 1983 and through the early 90s, the R.N.A. and Vita Wa Watu became the predominant political line that was embraced by conscious prisoners who considered themselves revolutionaries.

O: What sorts of conditions were you facing, both those imposed by the prisoncrats and those imposed by other inmates/inmate organizations?

I: [In] the early 80s, my fellow comrades and I did not find "tribalism" to be a problem while making our political transition, because there were very few members of street organizations within I.S.P. and Indiana Reformatory. Therefore, they presented no opposition to our political development and subsequent organizing. We were stagnated somewhat by regionalism; this is to say, prisoners from Gary, Hammond, and East Chicago in general felt like they were superior to prisoners from other cities within Indiana. This regional schism was very pervasive in general population at I.S.P. However, after those of us who were influential were placed on D/S and A/S units, we overcame such regionalism by forging a brotherhood of unity and solidarity through our struggles together.

After many of my comrades and I had become politically conscious, the prisoncrats employed numerous devious methods to offset, undermine, suppress, repress and neutralize our influence on other prisoners. For example, in 1986 in I.S.P. and Indiana Reformatory (which were our strongholds), we were ran over with a bunch of young, wild and confused gangbangers. They represented the street organizations known as Gangster Disciples and Vice Lords, mostly.

Some of our cadres saw these youngsters as potential revolutionary soldiers. In most instances, however, before our cadre could even breathe on these young gangsters, they were snatched up out of general population and placed on A/S units, in an attempt to marginalize them. As a result of this marginalization, the gang bangers undermined the unity and solidarity that existed amongst black

murder was supposedly a result of a conspiracy between prisoners and prison officials. Johnny was not a conscious prisoner, but nevertheless he was the most influential prisoner in the state of Indiana. His hustle was drugs and gambling. He controlled the vast majority of the drugs that were trafficked into the prison. His ability to control the flow of drugs granted him a lot of clout (whoever controls the economy usually controls the prison.)

The murder of Johnny was the beginning of a paradigm shift, where economics were removed from the control of Black and New Afrikan prisoners (Johnny was a New Afrikan) and transferred to white prisoners. The murder of Johnny Hodge marked the beginning of the end of "Indiana State Prison" as a prison. On a positive note, the death of Johnny helped to raise the consciousness of other prisoners.

From 1986 through 1991, the political atmosphere at I.S.P. and Pendleton were most intense. There were a a lot of clashes between the prisoners and prison authorities. These clashes usually took place on D/S units. At both prisons, the guards were brutal cowards and some were factionalized into several racist gangs, i.e. the Klan, the Sons of Light, neo-Nazis and Masons, usually headed by a high ranking major, captain or lieutenant. The clashes that occurred were the results of intolerable living conditions, colonial captivity, denial of human rights, racist guards, abuse and brutality, and rehabilitative fraud.

The federal courts had basically told prison administrators that they could do to us as they saw fit, and the courts wouldn't intervene. Prison authorities in turn began rolling back the gains we had won in the past. This is to say, many of the same human rights issues that prisoners fought so bitterly for in the 60s and 70s (decent food, adequate medical care, education, meaningful contact with the family and community, safe living conditions) were being deliberately undermined.

In the 1980s and 90s there were four political lines that dominated the thinking of prisoners within IDOC: African People Socialist Party (A.P.S.P.), the All African People Socialist Party, the Republic of New Africa (R.N.A.), and the Black Liberation Army (B.L.A.). In the early

spheres, so to speak. And within that mix you have the age difference; guys that had been down 15-20 years, the old Gs or the elders, that had a certain amount of authority or prestige, and they was ultimately challenged by the younger generation coming up.

So you had all that going on, and through a process of what I called class warfare, where the guys that I called "neo-colonialist", who had been down a long time and had certain positions of power and prestige with the administration, were allowed a certain amount of latitude, and in my opinion had become comfortable in prison. They had become complacent towards a lot of the brutality and other shit that was going on, whereas a lot of guys in my generation were coming up and challenging that. The model was fall in line or get run over!

So over time, through addressing certain issues or certain violations that the DOC was puttin' down or certain attacks that certain members of the DOC would carry out against various prisoners, we started responding to that militarily and politically. Politically in the forms of anonymous flyer or anonymous leaflet; you know, a lot of guys would go to rec and come back and find a leaflet or flyer on they bed, calling for unity across racial lines and other lines, you know. And they might not have known for sure who was doing it, but they could've said it was coming from these guys or those guys. And, you know, we had enough respect amongst prisoners in general that we could cross certain lines; you know, I could go talk to the Aryans or go talk to the bikers or any organization within the institution and my word gonna be my bond. If I come, you know it's not about no bullshit or a joke, you know, I get my respect, but I bridged a lot of gaps. Even when reactionary conduct would manifest itself, just by standing on principle. You know, we had a policy against rape. It don't matter who you is or who you doin' it to, what your reputation supposed to be, you ain't doin' that over here. And we didn't discriminate. And that gave us a certain amount of respect and credibility from the rest of the prison population. So when calls came for certain kinds of unity or unity in action, you could get that.

O: Could you talk about specific struggles that you were involved in, or ways that this political education manifested itself in certain notable events or notable examples of this type of unity?

I: Right, one good example would be the hunger strikes at the MCC. Which really was a turning point for political prisoners in Indiana. We had turned into a new era, as we were able to start cultivating outside support. Which, you know, I think in some ways, on one level or another, had always existed, but at that time it went through some leaps, the outside/inside unity. When the MCC first opened, it was the State of Indiana's response to the transit situation; you know, not having anywhere to put all they bad apples. The leadership, the guys that was influential or whatever, when it first opened, that's who went. The guys who was political prisoners, the leaders, the guys with tremendous influence throughout the system, or escape artists.

It was the typical, modern day slave-breaking station. That's what the whole concept was, we gettin' ready to break you. From the second they opened the door, the situation was hostile, aggressive, take no prisoners, hands-on approach, coming in the door. And they hired as warden over the prisoners, the guy who not only had an axe to grind, but was totally unqualified. And they knew that, they set him in there as a fall guy, you know, to set the tone. And we got in there, they was moving us all in or whatever, we were in a situation where we couldn't respond violently. And some dudes, that's all they knew, and they tried to respond violently, but they was crushed. We were in a situation of total control. So I came up with the idea of a hunger strike, when I first got there, cause that was the only alternative I saw for us to organize and respond on a collective level.

And, so um, there was written on a note trying to pass on to another comrade, and in the note... they was beatin' a lot of guys, jumpin' a lot of guys for no reason... and in the note I was like, look, we need to form some kinda unity here. We need some structure to take up this issue. You know, a lot of these pigs jumpin' a lot of us, we need

at least 8 hours of out of cell recreation time. As well, prisoners were allowed to order food from outside restaurants every 90 days. In short, the prisoners at I.S.P. were granted everything but conjugal visits.

The political atmosphere on the D/S units at I.S.P., in contrast to the political atmosphere in general population, was teeming with political consciousness in 1980. The segregation units (A/S and D/S) at I.S.P. and at Pendleton Reformatory were converted into schools to turn out revolutionaries from 1980 through the early 90s. As a matter of fact, the ideology of Communism was so predominant amongst the prisoners, that once we went to general population, the prisoners there were subsequently influenced by our ideas as well. In short, the outside (gen. pop.) was influenced by the inside (segregation).

In 1983, the laidback easygoing political atmosphere I described in 1980 had begun to dissipate as a result of a lot of repressive measures being implemented. It must be remembered that Ronald Reagan was elected as President in 1980, and his whole agenda was based on setting back civil liberties. He nominated over 200 conservative judges to the federal courts, who were instrumental in helping him carry out his reactionary policies designed to undermine a criminal defendants rights.

Repressive restrictions: in 1981 I.S.P. officials made it a mandatory policy that all prisoners wear I.D. cards; in 1982, the movies which were shown in chapel every weekend were now piped into the prisoners cells for them to see on their televisions (a move designed to control movement); in 1983, our personal clothes were taken away and we were forced to wear white jump suits on D/S units; prison custody no longer ran the prison, the prison was now governed by unit teams which consisted of counselors and case managers.

There was one incident in particular that occurred in 1983 that I considered to be a pivotal point in the prison officials seizing control of the prison and repressing the prison population. At I.S.P. in 1983, a very influential prisoner named Johnny Hodge was murdered in A-cell house. He was burnt up in his cell by two white prisoners. Johnny's

O: What was the political climate like in the 80s and 90s?

I: As a general rule, the prison struggle mirrors the struggles and contradictions within society outside of the prison walls. Due to the enclosed environment of the maximum security prison, the effect is often one of magnifying these contradictions—both positive and negative aspects. This is to say, that in prisons, one finds the seeds of heroic rebellion and hopeless apathy; the heights of revolutionary character and the depths of human predation and sadism. Thus, the relative lull in mass resistance to U.S. imperialism and the lack of revolutionary leadership on the streets find their reflections in the prisons.

In 1980, at I.S.P. in general population, the political atmosphere was a laidback and easygoing one. The lack of a political intensity or revolutionary fervent was not the result of apathy, rather it was because the majority of the older prisoners who had been politically active in the past were resting on their laurels. It must be understood that the vast majority of prisoners imprisoned at I.S.P. were 28 years of age or older and were serving lengthy sentences (prior to 1977, you had to be 28 years of age or older in order to be classified for assignment to I.S.P.) A lot of them were involved in various social and political struggles in the 60s and 70s.

In the early 70s, their collective resistance in conjunction with their class action lawsuits forced the prison administrators to make some internal reforms within their prison by yielding the prisoners some humane concessions. For instance, the prisoners were granted permission to organize amongst themselves to a certain extent. There were organizations such as Lifers, Jay Cees and Chess Club that really had teeth as far as being an advocate on the behalf of prisoners were concerned. The overall conditions were improved as a result of these humane reforms.

For instance, medical care was adequate, the law library services were first class, the food we ate had a high quality. In terms of education, we had Pell Grants and college classes, the commissary department provided us with first class items. Prisoners were allowed

to make an example out of ‘em; find a way to penetrate they security and make an example out of ‘em, let ‘em know that we ain’t gonna be sitting there allowing them to individually beat on us and so on and so forth. And so I outlined some points for a hunger strike. Well, needless to say, when I went out on the floor to go to rec, they went in there and searched my cell and found the note. So I was moved to another area of the prison, that hadn’t even been opened up yet; I was on a 56-man pod all by myself. Then they moved a dude named [*Prisoner A*], a white dude, who I had known for a long time, they moved him into the building. So we the only two people on this whole pod, cell block area.

And they had a pig sittin’ outside our cell doors with a goddamn baton 24 hours a day. But, you know, we was corrupting these pigs, you know. Cause what they do is take these pigs and show them these training films about these guys is dangerous, they the worst of the worst, you cain’t trust ‘em and they’ll kill you in a heartbeat. They fed them all of this propaganda. And these pigs coming in here, they interacting with us, they see a whole nother flavor. And while you got those that have lost touch with all sense of humanity, they oppressive to what, but those that still have a sense of self, of humanity, they responded. And I was able to talk to them about some ideas.

So I came up with the idea: why don’t we try to organize a hunger strike commemorating Attica? And so I organized the political aspect of it, and [*Prisoner E*], he was a jailhouse lawyer, he handled the legal aspects of it. And so that’s what we did, we sat there and drafted up, what I think was, um, 19 demands. And it just so happened that something happened in the other area of the prison and they had to move all the guys down to where we was at. That allowed us to communicate with all the other guys. And the concept was that on such and such a day, we want everybody to refuse to eat. And we going to try to do it at least 30 days, until they get a court order to force feed us. In the meantime, we was trying to organize people on the streets to hold press conferences for us, to get the information out, to contact radio stations and whatnot. And there was a lady by the name of [*Outside Supporter A*], out of South Bend, who had already been doing some work in the community, but she had some people in prison that she communicated

with, and I had written her about this.

So, to make a long story short, we started out with about 40 guys on the hunger strike. They were sort of taken aback by the seriousness of it, but the unified action, because we were not supposed to even be able to communicate. But they blew it off as a joke, they dismissed it. The first five or six days went on and people started dropping off. We would eventually go down to a core group of about 15 guys. So when the information started getting out, they moved us, they tried to isolate us. Which was actually a big mistake, because it allowed us to not only inspire one another, but to feed off of one another. This made us stronger. But the warden, he was so reactionary, he would come through there and he would antagonize, verbally abuse individual prisoners with such disrespect and unprofessionalism. And all that would just add fuel to the fire. And then their goon squad would take us out, make us go out there and let them take our vitals. But all of the abuse, all of the repression they poured on us just made us stronger, made us determined to go another day.

It was the first time I had ever been on hunger strike. And at first we weren't drinking water, but it was hurting us and we didn't realize. So the second or third day we started drinking water. And it went on and on, and after the 10th or 15th day, it was all in the press, we were getting a lot of media; people were holding rallies to support us and what not. So then they tried to divide and conquer. They put some of us out by ourselves, spread all of us around, to isolate us and to break us. But we were still going pretty strong. Then I slipped up and made a tactical error. When doing an interview over the phone, with the newspaper, I had stated that we were going to go at least 30 days. Which allowed the DOC to gauge how long we were going to go.

And they waited us out, then, where we probably would have broken long before the 30 day period. But they waited us out, and when they'd seen that guys were going beyond the 30 days, they waited us out another week, to the 37th day, before they started getting the court orders and what not. Myself, my first hunger strike I went 18 days, the second one I went 21 days. But what came out of this was a sense of

senior and despite our age differences, he never talked down to me.

For example, instead of telling me what to do, or how I should do it, he would always suggest how I should do things. He treated me as his equal even though I knew very little. As a result, I always felt genuinely respected. [Prisoner G] and I had a beautiful rapport, which was instrumental in us developing the Black Dragons years later (The Black Dragons were our version of the Black Guerrilla Family.)

O: What sorts of materials/outside influences helped you along in this process?

I: Some of the books and materials I read that helped shape my political and social consciousness are listed as follows: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*; *Let the Trumpet Sound* (bio of MLK); *Assata*; *Angela Davis' autobiography*; *The Autobiography of W.E.B. DuBois*; *Soledad Brothers*; *Blood in my Eyes-George Jackson*; *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*; *Chains and Images of Psychological Slavery*; *The Theory of Knowledge; Materialism and the Dialectical Method*; *Africa Must Unite*; *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*; *Historical Materialism, Marx, Engels and Lenin*; *Imperialism: The Last Stage of Capitalism*; *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*; *Stolen Black Labor*; *Black People and the U.S. Economy*; *Bread, Peace, and Black Power*; *"The Black Working Class vs the U.S. Government"*; *Sun Views*; *The Mythology of the White Proletariat*; *Vita Wa Watu*; etc.

As far as outside influences are concerned, there weren't many but I did subscribe to *Burning Spear Newspaper*; *Crossroad Shield and Spear Magazine*; *Worker World Magazine*; *Prisoner News Service*. To be honest, in the past I never felt comfortable communicating with people I didn't know or trust. In addition to this, I was not confident enough to place my political ideas in the public arena for them to be debated. If they were, I was not prepared to defend them. I didn't have the patience. For these reasons, I didn't do a lot of networking with outside sources.

omitted.] were all mentors to me. There were all approximately eight years my senior and consequently they had a lot of influence on me.

[*Prisoner H*] and I knew each other prior to my entry into prison, but because he was three years older, we had never really hung out with each other. The dynamic of our relationship changed once we entered prison. Circumstances forced us into an alliance based on the defense of each other and our homeboys. Our partnership in combat eventually developed into true friendship and from our friendship we grew to love each other as brothers. We were so similar that people often mistook us for each other, and it blinded us to each others' faults. This is to say: in each others' eyes neither of us could do any wrong.

[*Prisoner H*] and I became the self-appointed warlords of Indianapolis. We were to first to jump into the fray. We believed that we had an obligation to retaliate and protect our homeboys, who were being attacked, harassed and intimidated.

From 1979 thru 1983, additionally, while I was on and off D/S units at I.S.P., a brotherhood of unity, solidarity and love was forged between myself and my fellow prisoners housed on these units, as a result of our collective struggle of resistance towards authority in general and prison authority in particular. The following persons were my brothers... [*Ed: list of prisoners' names omitted.*] Our brotherhood of common struggle and resistance protected us from the retaliatory wrath of the prisoncrats. The prisoncrats knew and understood that any violent act committed against one of us would be an act committed against all of us, and that we would respond accordingly.

Out of all of the aforementioned prisoners I listed who were member of the brotherhood that was forged on the D/S units, the ones who helped to raise my political consciousness were [*Prisoner G*], [*Prisoner H*], [*Prisoner I*] and [*Prisoner J*]. In truth, all of these comrades were instrumental in my political development to some extent, but no one deserves as much credit as [*Prisoner G*]. [*Prisoner G*] was to me what the late W.C. Nolen was to George Jackson. He had the perfect temperament to complement my young diseased ego. He was twelve years my

accomplishment. Guys were motivated and inspired to "rise to the occasion."

You know, at the time, one strategy was everybody file a lawsuit; even if you don't know how to keep it going, just get it filed. So you know, we doin' that, filin' motions for guys, guys that ain't never thought of picking up a law book. So we clogged up the court system. And then, the DOC policy was that if you had less than \$30 in your account, they had to copy, make as many copies as you want, as long as it was legal stuff. So if I filed a suit, and I got ten COs as defendants, that's ten copies of the motions and so forth... you know what I'm sayin'. Another thing we did was we were organizing in each section, where we was taking votes on anything that dealt with everybody. And it didn't matter what your affiliation was, what your race was, we were able to have discussions. And we would write articles, get articles in regarding our struggles, read the articles out over the range and have discussions.

And this went on for years. And, you know, the flip side of that was that it allowed us to work with outside groups with radical lawyers and what have you, to aid and assist us. It allowed inside/outside relationships principled, political relationships to be cultivated and developed. And this eventually spilled over to some of the work being done around the anti-death penalty work.

And something that people don't talk about much, is that one of the principle reasons the DOC gave in, caved in on MCC was that the destabilization and protests there was starting to have noticeable effects in other prisons in the state. You had lots of acts of solidarity that were unfolding in other prisons that were in support of what we were doing. And some of us had actually sent calls to guys in other prisons saying "hey we need some support down here, we need some help down here." And so the DOC realized they were getting ready to have a state wide crisis on their hands. There was a non-violent actions at Pendleton, a non-violent march at Pendleton, and as a response they locked them down for 9 months. So it was catching, it was like a prairie fire.

It educated a lot of people, it politicized a lot of people and pushed a lot of guys off into new directions of political development.

So just to be clear, we're talking about the early to mid-90s, right?

O:
Yea, we're talking about '91-'92.

I:
So what sort of long term effects have you seen stemming from the development of these struggles in '91-'92? How did it go on from there? What were the lasting effects of the relationships that were built between the outside and inside or amongst different prisoners at different institutions?

I: I mean, I would say now, that back then I think there was a degree of romanticism on both sides, on the inside and outside. And I think a lot of people on the outside had their own agendas. And that's one of the reasons we don't have structures or institutions out there today in Indiana like you do in some other places. We didn't have a real radical or revolutionary inside/outside relationship that wasn't based on liberalism. But like I say, I think for a lot of people it was sort of an on the job training thing. You still going through developments just like people on the outside, and you tryin' to navigate around the state to build real principled relationships.

As far as other events, like I said, a lot of that sparked the resistance to the use of the death penalty in Indiana. It brought out more solidarity and support for the brothers over there on death row and increased our understanding of some of the stuff they was dealin' with. And it brought up some of the stuff they was dealin' with down at Pendleton, the racial situations. But what the state's response was they started pushing a lot of people out of prison; they started parolin' guys, they started isolatin' others more. And to a certain extent it helped to undermine the movement that was being created.

What was the process that developed that stamped out that sense

the police in Marin County, California; the assassination of George Jackson at San Quentin Prison on August 21st 1971; and the Attica Prison Rebellion in September 1971 and the subsequent killing of 39 prisoners and the wounding of hundreds of others.

The recent events that stand out and impacted my way of thinking were: the murder of James Grimes in 1981 by Indianapolis police. James was murdered in front of his wife and one year old son, downtown on the circle for a parking violation. The murder of Michael Taylor in September of 1987 by Indianapolis police, while he was handcuffed in the back seat of a police car. The massacre of the men, women and children of MOVE in 1985 by Philadelphia Police on order of neocolonialist Wilson Goode, which resulted in these MOVE members being burned alive in their own home.

Whether in the past or present, the fact is that when police murder and kill Black people or New Afrikans the same excuses are recycled and used over and over again. As a result, nearly no one in the Black or New Afrikan community believes that the police are there to serve and protect.

O: What sorts of folks were you rotating with back then? What sorts of interactions did you have that helped further your political consciousness?

I: When I first arrived at I.S.P, I sought and hung out with people who thought and behaved like me such as... [Ed: list of prisoners' names omitted.] These were the individuals I went to war with/against other prisoners. We were involved in a lot of predatory behavior where we robbed and stole from other prisoners.

For instance, myself, [Prisoner A] and [Prisoner D] broke into so many other prisoners' cells that we forced prison officials to change policy and procedures in regards to how cell houses were to be released for recreation and chow. We were notorious rogues. [Prisoner E], [Prisoner F], and [Prisoner G] were gambling partners on the regular. We shot dice three or four times a week... [Ed: list of prisoners' names

myself of the criminal mentality while undergoing my transformation and emergence as a leader. In the early 1980s, D/S units at I.S.P. were teeming with social, political, historical and cultural consciousness (as a result of the confinement of numerous politically conscious Black or New Afrikan prisoners who had been singled out and targeted for harassment for whatever reasons.) I distinctly remember a rad [*Prisoner A*] walking around with a shirt on that read: “Black People Are A Nation Behind Bars”. I recall [*Prisoner B*] and [*Prisoner A*] having some intense discussion about colonialism and neocolonialism, and arguing how they were responsible for the plight of black people. As a young nationalist, I was susceptible to these anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist messages.

In short, while I was on D/S units at I.S.P., I was exposed to some social, political, cultural and economic ideas that inspired me to begin to think in a systematic, critical way about my past lifestyle, about the world and the society in which I lived. As a result, I began to question the way things were, I came to the realization that revolutionary change in my life, in society was both possible and necessary. As a politically conscious prisoner, it became apparent that Black people or New Afrikans are a colonized nation, imprisoned within America (that is, colonized within the supreme colonizer.) The legislative branches of the U.S. government, in conjunction with its courts and prisons, function as instruments and lynch pins to perpetrate our repression.

O: What sorts of incidents opened your eyes, so to speak?

I: There is no one single event or incident that is responsible for the awakening of my consciousness. Rather, the awakening of my consciousness can be attributed to a culmination of recent and past events, personal growth and experience.

The past events that do stand out, however, just to name a few, were: the assassination of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark on December 4th 1969 by Chicago Police; the murder of Jonathan Jackson, William Christmas and James McClain on August 7th, 1970 by

O: of unity that being developed?

Well, you know, you always got the high tide and the low tide, the **I:** back and forth. It was a combination of factors, you know, some guys got out, some of the leadership.

Was that an explicit thing that was done as a maneuver of the state?
O:

I: I think so. They had started paroling a lot of the “old guard”, they guys locked up since the 70s, they started going in front of the parole boards and were getting out. And also they started moving a lot of these old heads, who had been in the maximum security situations behind the walls, they started moving them out to the lesser security prisons, what we call the kiddie camps and started bringing some of the younger guys up and putting them behind the walls. And so what they did was allowed a vacuum to be filled. And a lot of these guys come in, they don’t know the history of the prison, the struggles that had happened and the sacrifices made, and so the administration was able to impose a lot of things that the new guys didn’t know how to struggle against.

They implemented what they called controlled movement, where they tightened up on one’s ability to move around. Then they started to tighten up internal security, putting up a lot of gates and fences, securing different areas; cutting down a bunch of larger areas into a bunch of smaller areas, which gave them better control. It was a systematic approach, you know, COINTELPRO behind the walls; some guys became discouraged, some became more isolated, putting them on the SHU [Secure Housing Unit], isolating them on the SHU, some became disenchanted when things didn’t develop on the streets the way we thought they might, that was discouraging as well.

So, really, there was a combination of factors. And then they younger prisoners coming in also... when I went to prison, the crack epidemic hadn’t hit the communities yet, the drug economy as we know it today hadn’t really started to flourish... so by the mid-90s

on, population started being filled with guys that might have been in the game, hustlers and what not, and that started to manifest itself in the prisons as well. Coming up for me, it was taboo to do the hard drugs. I mean, you always had the weed and the alcohol, but the cocaine, the smokin' and the snortin' and the heroin and whatnot, for me coming up that was taboo. Whereas now, it's almost like you a virgin if you haven't done it. And it's rampant. And, so now, instead of politics being in command, it's economics; peoples' relationships started being defined by their relationship to that drug economy.

And at the same time, the administration allowed a lot of the right wing groups to become more entrenched, to being to flourish. So all these type of things going on, and politics and struggle... I mean, you still got your Kwanzaa and Black August or whatever that guys celebrate, but, like I say, we're a dying breed.

And they did other things too, you know, they brought BET into the prisons, they started allowing females to work inside the walls. Which, in my opinion, were two of the worst things that they could've ever did. With the women, all of the sexual politics around that and the relationships that were being developed. As well as the fact that a lot of them were used as infiltrators. They'd come to guys, use their femininity and get information.

And on the other side with the BET with the videos and the music and so forth... not that I'm opposed to hip-hop and all that... but it distracted dudes, it got people tied up in that nonsense as opposed to pickin' up a book or what have you. And the administration has manipulated that, they played on it, they used it to their advantage. And guys like myself, people who they think might be capable of organizing something or spearheading something they keep isolating.

What sort of things do you see happening today? What are some

O: of the positives and negatives that you see? And what's your analysis of how things might change to move in a different direction?

interview with a comrade in long-term isolation

Outside Interviewer (O): Could you describe yourself, how you saw yourself, when you first entered into prison?

Inside Interviewee (I): I had no political consciousness when I entered prison. I was nineteen years old when I entered Indiana State Prison in December of 1978. I could barely read and write. I was socially, historically and culturally ignorant. This is to say, I had no idea of who I was or what my purpose was in life. On a subconscious level, I felt like a failure and hated myself. My understanding of politics extended no further than the ballot box. Despite my lack of political consciousness, I was naturally anti-authoritarian!

O: How did you gain an understanding of your political position, vis-a-vis the prison system/state?

I: The process in which I gained an understanding of my political position was a slow and gradual one. For the first five and a half years of my imprisonment, I ran around like a reckless young fool victimizing other prisoners who dared to challenge me, in addition to those I considered to be weak and despicable. I quickly established a reputation as a young tough, that was feared and respected by his peers. As a result I saw no need to change or evolve beyond the way I was perceived and the way I too saw myself.

My preying on other prisoners was not necessarily a philosophical choice. I was forced to support myself, by hook or by crook because my repeated period of imprisonment over the years had estranged members of my immediate family from me, to where they no longer supported me financially. My predatory behavior and my anti-authoritarian attitude resulted in me being placed on the disciplinary segregation (D/S) unit repeatedly.

It was on the D/S units at I.S.P. where I was radicalized. The radicalization that I underwent was instrumental in helping me rid

someone with and say, “Hey, these things would be really helpful in terms of your understanding of the legal system and how to approach it in terms of things going on in prisons...” Are there specific ones that you know?

I: Yeah, there’re some cases. Not off the top of my head, but I do have this list in there, and I’ll get it out and share it with you.

□

And I would suggest another thing: read all prison policies, all of them. I would suggest that we give copies of them to y’all piece by piece, and if y’all can acquire them, piece by piece, get a copy of every prison policy in here. Because, back in the day, this was one of the things I lacked, knowing and understanding the prison policy, because there are certain ways that you can make these officers do their job, or suffer the consequences of not doing their job. They got a thing called derelict of duty, and if these officers don’t do their job in accordance to the law or the policies, you can file a lawsuit and say “You’re derelict of duty,” and they can get fired. All this stuff I didn’t know until recently, I started becoming familiar with it. And another good thing about the law is the Freedom of Information Act, there’s a lot of public records that come into good hands, come in good at some point.

I think a few things that’s going to reverse some of the trends that
I: going on in Indiana’s prisons now, you know, apathy... I think there are going to be things developing out of spontaneous events, you know, like a traffic stop in a neighborhood that become brutal, and out of situations like that, other things will develop where guys will become more serious in thinking about things that we want to get out of being behind these walls. That’s one of the few ways I see outside support...

You know, you got guys that’s quietly cultivatin’ relationships, quietly working amongst guys that show interest to develop some consciousness or what. Cause you know now, the old days, the old ways of being able to engage verbally for hours over different politics, now you have the guy next door writing down every damn thing you say, if not recording it, and turning it into internal affairs. So a lot of the methods you utilized back then, you can’t utilize today. And it’s going to take some of these guys in some of these street organizations to infiltrate their organization and try to push it forth in a more positive direction. It’s gonna require some serious house cleaning... I don’t really know the answer to that. It’s a daunting task; it’s not that I’m saying it can’t be done, cause it can be done, but it’s going to take a lot more inside/outside support and networking, man, guys in here to commit to engage in serious struggles. And right now, the State don’t respect us cause they figure we’re weak, that we don’t have outside support. There’s no real exposure to the crimes they’re committing, and so it has emboldened them to become more aggressive in doing what they do.

In terms of the outside support that you see as being integral to
O: this, what sort of stuff are you talking about?

Even back then, with the work that *Human Rights Held Hostage* was
I: doing, we had a voice. It allowed guys a voice, it allowed guys to read materials from they peers and so on. It was inspirational and it motivated people to do things. And I see actions as educational tools. You know, like they just did up in Madison around the union

busting and so forth... Like some of the shit they be doin' on the SHU, some of these murders, these mysterious suicides that have been going on in Indiana the past 4 or 5 years, there's no outcry, there's no moral outcry or putting the DOC on the defense. That's one of the things that we were really productive and good at, was keeping the DOC on the defense. Making them explain the self, making them justify the self for the shit they try to do in the dark. And it forced them to come to the table.

I will say this in terms of outside support... You got a lot of young dudes here that got a lot of time. They're looking for some meaning to their life; they're rebellious, but for the wrong reasons, they just looking for some direction. A lot of times, if they don't feel hopeless or by themselves, if they feel like they got people on the streets that willing to support them in their activities, actions, and struggles, a lot of times that motivates one and inspires one to get involved in things. But when someone comes at them weak, just like a dope boy they hustling, you try to give them a book, they like "I'm tryin to get some money, I got lawyers to pay" and you ain't got no alternative to offer, they ain't tryin' to hear it. It's the same thing in here with the grievance and whatnot, they don't see no reward in it, they don't support it. And the way that the DOC operates now, you stick your head up they make an example for the rest. It the whole concept of trying to force other prisoners to police one another.

Do you feel like concrete actions taken against prison society would

O: be things that are inspiring to folks on the inside?

Absolutely. Even if it's just visual support, you know. A lot of guys

I: in here, they feel isolated or alone, and because we so closed off in terms of information outside of the media and whatever publications come through, we can only believe there's nothin' going on out there. You know, people bullshittin' it, they not serious, blah blah blah. That's why the publication *4StruggleMag*...I get that and I circulate that to a lot of guys and they're like "damn, I didn't even know that was going on," reading about some of the action that is

the end of the rainbow before they wanna touch it. That's been my experience, but that's probably not the case with all experiences, but that's been the experience I've run into.

O: What do you see as a good starting point for folk working together to support and further struggle against the prison system using the legal system?

I: I would suggest that us from the inside, as well as people on the outside, familiarize themselves with the main books, and that the people on the outside, they do the same things we do—buy some legal books, or if they have computers, get them a computer program, and so that if we can't get access to the material we need, that we have an alternate route. Like somebody out on the street, if they find themselves with some free time, or if they know somebody that's already in this area, introduce us to them, or let us go through them to ask "Hey, will you get on the computer and look for this case?" Look for this, look for that... that would be a big help.

And, people on the street can file stuff on our behalf. If I was to bring a complaint to you and then showed you how to do it, you could take the complaint to the omnibus. You could take a complaint to the Inspector General. Even people on the street can file a complaint. For example, if you tried to send me some material and they don't let the material in, you could file a complaint. If you tried to visit someone in prison and they wouldn't let you in, you could file a complaint, on your own on you could file a complaint in conjunction. Stuff like that... if you ever was to find a lawyer that was willing to listen, that could be helpful too, but that's probably going to be a little hard. Getting people on the street to be familiar with the legal system—I mean, they don't have to know it, ain't none of us know it all the way, but if they get the basics... Go to the law clerk on the street and as for various kinds of phone warrants, familiarize yourself with various kinds of phone warrants. All that could end up being helpful in these efforts.

O: Do you have a list of important cases if you were to approach

good time away from you, things like that. So now, people are real cautious before they do it, and a lot of people that didn't want to do it in the first place now have a built in excuse for why they don't do it. "Man, I ain't got no 350 to do that! Man, I ain't getting wrote up and intentionally go to lockup for messing with those people."

O: So, you mentioned outside support as something that's been useful in terms of getting access to legal materials. I wondered if you could just talk a little bit more about that, or how that's functioned in the past in terms of specific things.

I: Outside support, for a lot of us, is hard to come by too. Say, for example, sometimes you might—I would write Northwestern University over there in Chicago. If you're lucky enough to find a young law student that's, you know, happens to need a certain level of experience or something, they might work with you; if you lucky enough to catch the attention of one of those professionals, they might work with you. But the thing is, they're so inundated with prison requests that the chances catching one with some spare time, or free time, ain't that likely. But it does happen. So if you can spread out to these big colleges or universities, or to some of these out of state legal organizations, you might get a little help there. That's been some of the routes we've been forced to take. Cause here in Indiana, if there's some outside help, it's so hard to come by, and by the time we run into some outside help, somebody is probably going to abuse it and misuse it to the point where they're so skeptical that they don't even want to mess with us.

O: Do you ever get help with legal research and stuff from more like prisoner support groups as opposed to legal support groups or something?

I: I'm not aware of it. A lot of prisoner support groups will tell you "We're not lawyers, we don't do personal research." My experience has been, you gotta have a big something that can grab the attention of the news before a prisoner organization wants to touch it, or you gotta have a big lawsuit where a decent little windfall can be at

going on around political prisoners.

When you see some kind of visual support, some kind of action, you know, sometimes in education actions speak louder than words. It inspires folks to get they house in order, to get serious about certain things, you know. And in terms of the DOC as a whole... It's like this unit, man, people do so much blatant disrespectful and oppressive shit to us; you know, they done killed people back there, they beatin' people. And it's because they're comfortable, you know, they think "I'm going do this shit and then go home and play with my kids and whatnot, and there are no consequences for what I do." If there were just some actions, you know, you would see a whole different attitude in what's going on back there. And I say that from personal experience.

And I done been in situations at ISP or Pendleton where there might be some demands made anonymously, there might be some military actions taken and they might find some pigs here or there split, you know, an action taken against a known terrorist pig. And the whole attitude for all the pigs of the whole camp changes. Cause now it's real for you, it's no longer the theory and other shit. And in terms of the other guys who is always the naysayers, you know, we can't... there ain't going to be any unity, these guys ain't going to support that, you know, it takes away that argument. It becomes "what are you going to do?", why are you always talking about what someone else is or isn't going to do.

You know, like I said I haven't been in population since '05, man. And the last 2 years that I was in population, at least in Pendleton anyways, it was economics in command, not politics. And it wasn't a high tide in terms of politicization or what have you. However, you had a lot of youth that if I was to say "Hey man, let's go do this or let's go do that", or "let's go take over the prison", I probably could've gotten 30-40 individuals to go and do that with me. You got guys that will support military action, but the thing about it is they don't have any politics. And the thing about that is, of that 30 or 40, when the shit hits the fan and the smoke clears, you're probably going to have 20 of them testifying against you. You know, cause there's no commitment to an

ideology or higher principle that they standing on.

And so, I can't really speak on that, and I don't think that... I think that outside support would be educational and would lead a heavy hand towards us getting together, making our jobs easier and being able to do some action or some politicization or what have you. But right now man, dudes just hustlin'. You asked me an important question in your last letter about that, and I got... I got mixed emotions on it. You asked "what role can hustlin'" play in terms of building or supporting this or that. I don't have a concrete or firm position on that.

It's a real issue, I mean... I'm not opposed to... I mean, here's my thing, you know, I got partners, man, some of my guys, most of the guys that I roll with, I done did time with. Guys that I got history with, that had been 10, 20 years in the penitentiary and I've seen what they're made of. So I got this circle, including folks in the community that I've met. And, when I was out, we would have meetings over at my house, and we would be 15, 20 individuals. Everybody had did time, most no less than 10 years. And everybody wasn't revolutionary; you just had some dudes that was good dudes, some dudes that was just solid, some square 9-5ers, some dudes that was in the gangs. But everybody there was working to reach back to aid and assist dudes that was still locked down. And so I don't see it as black and white; you know, on the one hand you got guys out there that may be political or conscious on some levels but they in the game, they just hustlin' in there doin' they thing. And the argument is always "well, I'm gonna get in, get whatever and get out," but I've yet to see a situation where guys get in and accomplish what they want and move on, usually they get caught up in the game cause they still got those bourgie value and aspirations and chasing the so called American Dream or whatever.

And so there's a fine line there. And for me, from my perspective, that's always been the route of least resistance. Because just as easily as you can be out there hustlin' that's easy, you get out there and form a cadre and take it to the person that's really responsible for you oppression, who's got his foot on your neck, reap the same rewards without violating your politics. So, in my opinion, when you're more comfortable

we got a little help but most of the time we don't even want to deal with them.

- O:** Have you found receptive lawyers in Indiana besides the ACLU at all? Are there people that you can work with, or is outside support mostly from the nonprofessional community?
- I:** Most of the time if you find a lawyer that will take it, it's because we've done all the legwork, all the hard work, and they're just gonna come in and get their little lawyer's fee. That's been my experience. When you file, starting at ground zero and you take it and push it, we had to do all the leg work, and when it came almost time to go to trial, once we survived the summer rejudgment, then you might find a lawyer who'll come in and change a few sentences, change a few verbs to act like they did all the legwork, and they reap the benefits here and there.
- O:** Is access to legal resources variable from place to place, or is it across the board at the IDOC?
- I:** It's endemic, across the board. They consciously give you the bare minimum, and even when they give you the bare minimum, there are a multitude of road blocks up there to keep you from actually being successful in filing any lawsuits against them, or any legal action against them.
- O:** Has there ever been any legal challenges over access to legal materials?
- I:** Yup. Well, I've had some, but I still lost. And the whole thing is, a lot of the time, for me and some other people, you don't know what you need to know until after you lose! And now they're going to shut it up to where you have to pay 350, might even be more than that, to file, and nobody has that type of money! And if you file three lawsuits and each of these lawsuits is determined to be frivolous, they retaliate against you by writing you up. They write you a Class D writeup, give you six months on lockup, take your

the Inspector General is an office within the Attorney General's office, but still separate from the Attorney General's office. He's like a person who can go by any state government and make them follow their own rules and make them follow their own laws. And I became familiar with how to make him do his job, I know how to open the doors and file a complaint to him, and then I know the laws that say if you file this complaint and file it this way, he's legally obligated to pursue this and to pursue that. So that could be a useful avenue to a person who becomes familiar with it and knows how to do it.

O: I'm wondering how has your access to different legal resources changed over the years.

I: It's always been bad. They deliberately, consciously, and knowingly throw up roadblocks to deny us access to the law library. What I end up doing is going through people on the streets, or meet somebody in college. There was a time when I had various family members in college, and they would introduce me to a friend, or maybe somebody else like my friend, he might know somebody at a college, or working at a college, and he would introduce me and we started going outside the prison law library to research stuff. But we never abandoned the prison law library—we kept it, but we just started going outside it.

And then, sometimes we would have to find someone over there who wasn't actually afraid to struggle, and we would try to use them off the record and pay them to get various case sites, stuff like that for us. Sometimes we'd even, this is another way we'd get it, we'd read a case site, and they'd put the other case site over in Michigan. But I couldn't get the stuff I needed over here, so I'd go to the lawyer who pursued the case over in Michigan, and she would send a whole bunch of material. We were doing stuff like that too.

We got very little realistic help from the ACLU here in Indiana. Pretty much, whenever we got a good case or an issue, they'd come in and water it down, you know, push it a little bit, very little... Yeah,

with slingin' in your community or whatever and contribute to the genocide of your own instead of going at the oppressor, to me that tells me that you still recognize, in some ways, the legitimacy of the state, that you still fear the state. Cause otherwise why wouldn't you just take it to the motherfucka that got they foot on your neck? So, like I said, it's a hard and complex question. Not everyone can take it to the state in that regard. Some people just got to do what they got to do to put food on they table, you know what I'm sayin'. So, I don't know. And in here we deal with, whether it's tobacco or weed or some of us got lawyers to pay or families to still take care of...and the same way with phones, you got cell phones in here selling for \$800-1000 each. So, politically, you in here sellin' phones or hustlin' phones, and you got some guy whose family is working class or whatever, strugglin', and you sell him a phone, a \$10, \$20 or \$50 phone for \$800, are you being a capitalist, are you being super-exploitative? There's a whole lot of questions like that.

In terms of inside/outside support, in your opinion how far should **O:** you push your own politics as an outside supporter to people on the inside? How far do you push that in terms of asserting your own position or how much do you mute your own position when working with people on the inside?

I think today more so one needs to be vigilant against opportun- **I:** ism, against people having their own personal agendas. Which goes both ways, cause you got the newsletters for prisoners, it's like the they poverty pimps, you know, and you got prison groupies just like you got anywhere else. And then you got prisoners that got they own agendas and aren't really committed to genuine revolutionary struggle. Then you got guys in here that are doing politics cause this is just how they doin' time, you know, this just what they doin'; they're not really committed to struggling or fighting for a new society, they haven't made that qualitative leap and commitment to getting out and contributing to the overall struggle.

Personally, I feel, that in terms of inside/outside relationships, people need to try to cultivate genuine comradeship where there's

some sort of mutual responsibility. I don't think that... I mean, you got people that saying they working or speaking for political prisoners interests, but I think it needs to be based on a genuine working relationship. Cause sometimes you have people who have a tendency to say that they represent us, and they haven't done time and they don't include us in terms of decisions or analysis or conclusions that they're coming to. It's almost like a paternalism, a paternal type of relationship. We don't need that! It's like, we don't know everything behind these walls, we in here studying and what not, but we haven't been on the streets in 15, 20 years out there in that reality. You guys are out there; y'all got boots on the ground. And therefore your perspective and vision is important to us; just as we deal with our reality in here and our perspective and vision must be important to and respected by you, and incorporated. I think there needs to be lines drawn, organizational lines, in terms of whether you going to be helping guys on they individual cases. What's going to be the criteria you have for choosing who you helping on they individual cases? What's your line in terms of personal relationships? I think an organization should have a concrete policy in terms of male/female relationships across these wall. Cause, speaking again from personal experiences, sometimes that can cloud judgements and push things in directions that is really not good for the overall collective. So it depends on what the mission of the organization is. And, I mean, we human, and so sometimes you can't help developing some types of personal relationships or what have you. But again, I think you have to be vigilant of it, you have to be conscious of it, it has to be dealt with above the table, you know what I'm saying?

You got to try to cultivate healthy type relationships, man. I mean, for myself for example, I got comrades that reached out to me, in my early stages of development when we was out here really bangin' with these people. And they was supportive and have been supportive, and over the years we built genuine comradeship where it was like "Dude, I would die for you, I would kill for you, I know you got my back," know what I'm sayin'. And here it is 20 years later, and we're still solid. And that's how it's supposed to be, it's a healthy relationship. But in terms of like support groups or whatever, a lot of times the underlying power dynamics or relationships are not really recognized or not

you don't we're gonna lose rec!" But we were saying "It's not our job to make John Doe shut his door, that's your job." So that was one incident in which we used a pen and paper—instead of using violence we just used a pen and paper to resolve that issue. And then, other issues—well, some of those issues that I contributed to, I can't really talk about them, because the way that we did it, and the way it was structured, it was like a cell, and only the people in that cell are supposed to know about them, so some of them I will have to pass. And some of those incidents, or one or two of them, we used a pen and paper. Because we had come to realize that in these prison struggles as well as out on the street, it doesn't always have to be a violent struggle, you can use your brain too. We came to realize that the pen and paper is a viable weapon in here, if it's used right.

O: So what sort of tactics... you sort of mentioned this one, where you sort of guide people through the mass filing of grievances and lawsuits and things, and that seems to be a pretty useful and common tactic in using the legal system, but are there other kinds of tactics, filing specific kinds of lawsuits against specific people for things, or...

I: Yeah. Well, in the past, I didn't know how to file habeus corpus, or 1983. But now, I got a little bit more better at it! Now, I know how to file things such as a rudimentae. Now I know how to file things such as a declaratory judgment. Now I know how to file things such as a injunction. These are all some of the legal maneuvers that were kept away from me because I didn't have meaningful access to the law library. But over time, getting stuck on these lockup units, learning from the people who had come before me, I started learning how to file other remedies. Now, I'm not necessarily stuck with a simple lawsuit, there are other motions and writs that can be filed that can make the prison people do what they're supposed to do, or shine light on them when they ain't doing what they're supposed to do.

Not too long ago, I became familiar with how to utilize what they got here in Indiana, it's called the Indiana Inspector General. Now,

no money, and we send over there and get five case cites at Pendleton, they let you have them for free.

So what we started doing was building our own law library, of some of the main cases, we started building a whole bunch of case cites and leave them on the lockup units. And we started building case cites so that we could have a small, satellite library that we could travel with, you know, so that's one way we started doing it. And here's another way we started using it—if you start reading a case, most of them—well, not most of them, all of them say that you have to exhaust the administrative remedies first. So that meant that I started having to learn how to file grievances, and had to work through the frustration of always losing them.

So we started filing the grievances and learning how to do that... but let me back up a little bit. Back in '04, when I was at Michigan City, not too long ago, they had a situation where the assistant superintendent over on DE, you know, came out with some type of rule that says that if one person in the group refused to shut his door, that everyone in the group would lose his rec. So, instead of just going crazy moaning and groaning, I said, "Well, let's file a lawsuit, a class-action lawsuit." So what I did is, I wrote the grievance up, put it in boilerplate, wrote about five of them up, and sent them off to each range to show other dudes how to do it. So other dudes started grievances, next thing you now they had fifty or sixty grievances on the same thing. And I kept taking everybody step by step, saying "Don't worry about it if they refuse it, because that's what they're supposed to do. All we have to do is to exhaust the administrative remedies." So I showed them how to exhaust the administrative remedies, then I showed them how to give notice to the court of the lawsuit.

So by the time we gave notice to the court, they had changed the rule. We knew, I did and a bunch of people knew, you can't go punishing me for what one person does. If John Doe decides not to shut his door, you can't punish me. But what they were trying to do, they were trying to force us to do their job, to turn hostility towards John Doe, so all the prisoners will say "Hey, John Doe! Shut your door, man, cause if

really addressed. I mean, we comin' from a position where we in need, where we in need of support or solidarity or whatever. You all are in a position of privilege because you're on the other side of these walls in minimum security. There's a power dynamic there, and a lot of times, that's not acknowledged. So there's that neediness, and that can become opportunistic or taken advantage of because of the position is in need.

And an individual might not even be aware of it. I mean, you want to get out, you need help, and you might not even be conscious of it, but that power dynamic is there, it's in play. And it's the same way with some students, you know, who are doin' they theses or whatever and they lookin' at prisons and prisoners. They reach in here askin' questions about our lives, trying to understand our reality in here, but they're doing it from a detached place; you know, almost like a case study. But they ain't feelin' me in terms of the struggle as a whole, about the effects that this shit has on colonized communities or oppressed communities. So you know, there's a lot of dynamics in play here. And it's frustrating, cause you got guys that have made a lot of sacrifices, guys that have "thrown their lives away" based on a commitment to an ideology, to an idea. I got friends in here that, because they stood for what they believe in, for their politics, they could've been on the street by now having kids raising a family or whatever, they came in these camps at 18, 19 years old and they took a stand. Now they got 100 years, 180 years because they was fighting against racist pigs or they were caught up in a riot and they took over shit.

But they don't have any outside support from the movement, and so when other guys look at that... I mean, these are the George Jacksons of Indiana, you know, brothers like [*Prisoner F*]... so you got these guys who are looking at these other dudes who are supposed to be an example, they're struggling so hard and they don't have any outside support they like "Shhh, man, that ain't for me." You know, that's a turn off for them, they ain't going to go that route. They like, "Where the support at?" They're talking "Man, you ain't sayin' nothin' I'm just tryin' to get this money, you're talking about something that ain't never gonna happen in my lifetime", blah blah blah. Pigs back here stompin'

our heads in or murderin' us and I can't call out to the streets and mobilize a unit or support structure to expose this shit or retaliate or hold some accountability. And yet one of these so-called gang members can get on a cell phone and call into the hood, holler at his peeps and say "hey, this mutherfuckin' pig did this or that," and people gonna know about it. And yet this is a lumpen. There's something wrong with that picture.

What do you envision in talking about this stuff? Is it simply an **O:** issue of bringing to the attention of a wider audience, is it an issue of retaliatory actions? What are you thinking about?

I: I think for us, at this particular juncture, it's an issue of bringing it to a wider audience, in terms of letting the event itself be educational, to set the tone, to set an example, to perhaps inspire other activities. I think that's the area we in right now. And I think that will shake the foundations... I'll just give you a hypothetical: you got dudes that have been on these units 10, 15, 20 years, these AS units basically for they politics or for some action they took however many years ago. Everybody knows that it's a violation of human rights or of the law, but nothing's being done about it. Now who's to say that if some individual that's in a position of authority or whatever got disciplined, and the explanation was made public that this was why this occurred, etc etc etc; that would immediately bring about attention and external investigations, you know, "Why are they being held on these units in this manner? Why have they been here for so long and who is responsible for seeing that this is not occurring?"

And on the flip side of this, it allows ones in the communities, even if they not directly associated with whatever, to go out and do some educating about these super max units, about these SHU units, you know Pelican Bay and whatnot, why the hell are they being held like this for so long because of they politics? And on the other side, we got a white supremacist situation around here that's flourishing. And one reason it's flourishin', man, is it's being supported by the state. They've been allowed to maneuver and get into positions of

who were working on their case, as well as working on civil matters challenging prison conditions.

O: Was there ever any kind of group of people trying to learn together to use... I don't know what the availability there was back in the day, if you all could get together and teach each other certain things, or if that was ever possible.

I: Well, this is how that went: we got together incidental. We would always end up on the lockup units, we'd end up in the same side or on the same range. Back then they used to put us on the lockup called IDU. And on IDU they would have some of the guys that were on X Row, Death Row. They would have them on there. Those guys were well advanced in legal research, and there were a couple guys who were showing me how to do things, were showing me where some of my mistakes were and why I kept messing up, why I kept losing, started explaining certain stuff to me, because I used to have the same—I used to read the case cite, and have the same issues that other dudes had won on, while I lost. And I couldn't understand why mine kept getting kicked out. So they started explaining to me the procedural defaults I kept running into—why I kept running into them, how I kept running into them. So, incidentally, we started grouping up, we started meeting up on the lockup units.

O: How have you and others been able to use the legal system, or the law library, or outside legal support to engage with certain types of struggle that were going on in the past?

I: Okay, in some ways, how we used to do it... they would always throw up road blocks, and say there might be four or five of us, there might be one or two dudes that's real, real good at the law, embedded with us, and we could only get five case cites at the time. So I would send over there and get the case cite they told me to get, somebody else would send over there and get the case cite, and while we were at the lockup units, at IDU, and—this was at the IDU and at Pendleton, you could always get one case cite for free. For example, if we send over there—if we're indigent and ain't got

interview with a jailhouse lawyer

Outsider Interviewer (O): How did you personally become involved or interested in researching legal issues and what sort of issues were you looking at with your own case, or who helped you with those sorts of thing, what was the process of you getting involved with that?

Inside Interviewee (I): When I first got started, I got started with doing my own legal research, working on my own case. Then, over the years, I stayed on lockup so much that I started running into guys that were also researching their own cases, but they were also researching prison conditions. And in the mid-80s, late 80s, early 90s, we had an organization in prison called the Lifers' Organization, and somehow they got the bright idea that I knew something about law. So the Lifers asked me to work on some prison issues, researching prison issues, and there were a couple of guys there that were showing me how to do civil. So from there, I got interested, it became a challenge, at some point it became fun, next thing you know I became hooked.

I started putting all my efforts... spending all my time in the law library. But at that time I'm still in the criminal mentality, I had not transformed yet, I'm still doing the petty criminal prison stuff—staying on these lockup units. I've been in prison basically all my life, but in prison I've also been in prison within prison. So during one of my stays on the lockup unit—and this was in the early days, when all of us started transforming from a criminal mentality to a political mentality. Guys were asking me to do research on prison conditions, and in the course of doing research on prison conditions, I started running across other political prisoners who were using the law library and the legal system to get off lockup units, to address police brutality, and I became familiar with it, then, the next thing you know, it was a natural step for me to start challenging prison conditions. I started learning how to file grievances, I started learning how to file lawsuits, but like I mentioned, I lost almost every time I did. But every time I'd lose, they would tell me why I lost. So I started, through the process of elimination, started catching on here and there. But that's how I came about it, I started by working on my own case first, then I started running into other people

power, they been allowed to set up bases and what have you. I mean, you got guys that come down here and give the damn Hitler salute, they ain't even putting no color on it. And it's common knowledge, common practice. Who's to say that, say some action got taken and it could be linked back to that community however falsely or whatever, that would put some things in motion.

What are the possibilities of network building amongst folks in
O: Indiana? Beyond Indiana?

We have our own networks, so yes, it's definitely possible. We have
I: basic networks, we have some basic structures, even in other units, where if they're shaking down or they're raiding or whatever... you know, cell phones have replaced the prison grapevine and took it to the next level. You know, that's why they're trying to say to the media "oh, it's just about the use of drugs and criminal activity," of course that's a part of it, but a lot of it has to do with the fact that people want to holler at their families, they want to communicate with their loved ones without paying these high prices that they're charging us on these regular phones. And another part of it is that they have the potential for us to organize. And these dudes, because of the fact that the mood is so low at this particular hour, they're just taking it for granted that they're always going to have access to this kind of technology. These dudes are just laying back, they're on their chat line, they're just playing, they're not maximizing usage that should be maximized for this particular hour because they're assuming that it's always going to be available. But if we ever wake up and get serious, and get committed to actually doing some building, the Department of Corrections is going to be in trouble, and they know it. This is why they're trying to pass laws now to implement jammers, and passing laws now to charge us with being caught with a cellphone, because they recognize the potential that it has.

People have to be careful, too, you guys out there, people on the streets, of putting us on pedestals because we're active. Again, speaking from experience, my first day in prison I was sixteen, I

didn't get with these people who were like hardcore... I've always been a leader-type dude, I've always had leadership skills, people always try to flock to me, it's a natural thing or whatever, so organizing came instinctually to me. So, going through my early stages of development, like the MCC hunger strikes, networking with people and being exposed to different levels of activists out there... and because we were accomplishing things and having victories and whatnot, people outside the walls had a tendency to put us on pedestals, like we don't have faults. You build up a certain expectation. So then when you do get out, if you get out, if you stumble or fall or whatever, some of these same people that are supposed to be comrades and allies or whatever, who fashioned this romanticized vision of you, are your worst critics.

That's amazing to me, because on one hand you say you're treating me as a conscious individual, that you're someone who understands revolution and understands the nature of oppression and imperialism and what have you, that understand the kind of psychological torture and trauma that people like us go through, and yet you're judging us and somehow are our worst critics, when you yourself, probably, more than not, have not been through what we've been through, and probably couldn't survive the shit that we have been through. And yet because you romantically put us on this pedestal that we didn't ask to be on, then you said all this other shit. And we don't need that. We struggle within the arena and on the terrain that we're forced to deal with, and then we come out there to the terrain where you guys are at and try to adapt and navigate that shit, after going through what we've been through. And there aren't mechanisms in places, structures in place, that are capable of absorbing those of us who do come out, who are damaged goods or have suffered post-traumatic stress or whatever.

And then we come out and watch how they all have personal agendas. Whether you want us to speak for you or whatever, it's not the type of relationship, like you were saying earlier, it's not genuine comradeship, working relationship, where this is what this is about. It's not just about what people can do for me, or what I can do for people, it's about that we are committed to our idea, an ideology, and a principle, and are trying to develop the means and the methods to deal with this shit and to

make some progress... and a lot of times, brother, that don't be what it is. And one of the reasons why—you know, this debate that has been going on for however many years, the traditional political prisoner versus the social prisoner turned political, what have you—one of the reasons that a lot of guys who get out fall away is because there aren't structures in place to absorb them. We don't have a liberated zone or a liberated territory where we can go to as conscious individuals and be nurtured and strengthened, where we could feed off of each other and be strengthened by each other. It's like you just go out there and you're trying to be proactive and progressive and revolutionary in a sea of reactionaries.

And if you don't have a firm foundation where you have made a qualitative leap and you got an internal base in yourself that you're standing on based on your values and your politics, nine times out of ten you're going to succumb to the madness around you or something else. And that's a bad thing, man. And I think that's been one of the biggest obstacles in our path, as far as having the institutions and structures that can support a political prisoner outside the walls in Indiana, for example, or the Midwest, that can be sustained—not that it can't just be popped up, we have our spurts. But it's not able to be sustained, anything that's really geared towards or is effective towards serious change.