

EXCLUSIVES WITH MUMIA & ASSATA



Number 3 \$5/ £3

ISSUE # 3

COMPILATION CD INSIDE

**THE COUP
GRAND RAN
LUCID DREAMS
EWUARE
OSAYANDE**

**FRED HO
RICANSTRUCTION
BRUDERHOF KIDS
IRIS BAEZ**



**Rafael Miranda, Yuri Kochiyama,
Russell 'Maroon' Shoatz,
Jack Hirshman, Luis Rosa,
Subcomandante Marcos,
Daisy Zamora, Eberhard Arnold**



BEIJING, CHINA



LONDON, UK



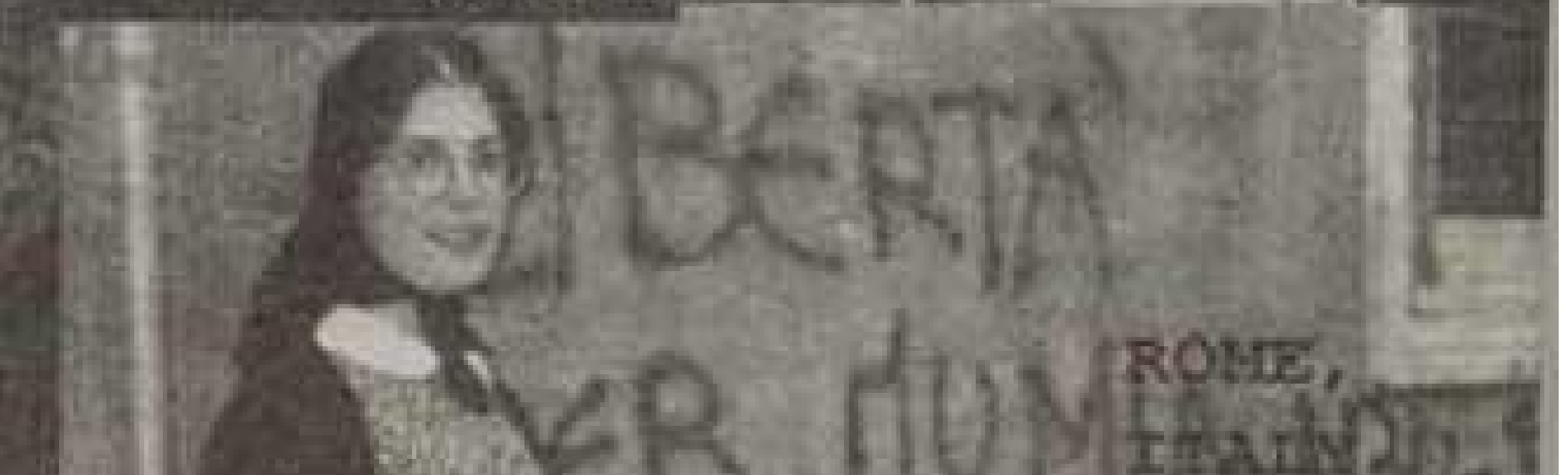
CRITICAL RESISTANCE
BERKLEY, CA



NORTH PHILLY, PA



CATSKILL MOUNTIANS N



ROME,
ITALY

A Hidden Volunteer in the Death Belt
[col. writ 3/9/99] ©1999 Mumia Abu-Jamal

WITH THE MERE mention of the place-
me -- Jasper Texas -- a silent stench in
the consciousness rises; an old, but not
forgotten, memory is stirred, an atavistic
pulse as old as America is rekindled. It
is the elusive demon of racism.

THE RECENT DRAGGING to death of
James Byrd Jr. by three members of a
newly organized white supremacist
group sent shock waves throughout the
nation and the world. It was particularly
shocking that Byrd was chained to a
pickup truck and dragged until his body
was torn to pieces. In Jasper one found
the blood-drenched imagery and
symbols of that America: a black man
bound in chains, the proverbial pickup
truck, and three young rednecks riding a
dark country road to hell.

IGNITED A FURY from the 'usual
suspects' of the Civil Rights Establish-
ment, predictable defensive reactions
from both the black and white
superstitious, and a sustained stunning of
the national psyche that may be
summed up in the rhetorical questions,
"Can this really be happening?", "Is this
possible?", or "Now? At the end of the
century -- now?"

LIKE A BAD MEAL infected with botu-
lism, America's racist toxin will always
come up, again, again, and again, an
undigested vomit of the national spirit.

IN A SPATE OF TEXAN vengeance one
of the young men convicted of killing
Byrd, John William King, was several
days later sentenced to death by the
same jury that convicted him; one black
jury foreman and eleven whites. That he
may become the first white man in the
state to be put to death for killing a
black man since before the Civil War is
more a condemnation of the state than

the killer. Historian Eric Foner, in *Recon-
struction: America's Unfinished Revolution:
1863-1877* (1988) writes of the Texas of
the Reconstruction Era:

... Texas courts indicted some 500
white men for the murder of blacks in 1865
and 1866, but not one was convicted. "No
white man in that state has been punished
for murder since it revolted from Mexico,"
commented a northern visitor. "Murder is
considered one of their inalienable rights."

IT DOES NOT REPAIR the system when
one (or three) white men are put on Death
Row for the torture murder of one Byrd.

IT IS LIKE COVERING UP the sores and
wounds of an entire body with a single fig
leaf, for, while it is true that history teaches
that the courts have traditionally devalued
black life, it is also true that King's death
sentence did not suddenly assign a pre-
cious value to the life of James Byrd Jr.

THE VALUE OF BLACK LIFE is daily deval-
ued by the placement in projects, by denial
of jobs, by crumbling schools that are but
tombs of the mind, and by silent acquies-
cence with the murders of blacks by state
actors -- cops.

BY OPTING FOR DEATH, Mr. King joined
a large and primarily white group that has
surrendered to death's grip. Of the Death
Row population that volunteers to die,
over 80% are whites seeking to flee from
increasingly blacker and younger Death
Rows.

WHICH MILIEU do you think provides
King with the greatest safety: Death Row,
or living as a skinhead in a predominately
black prison population?

I, FOR ONE, DISSENT from the court's
sentence and so oppose the death penalty
that I wouldn't even wish it on him.

The Killing Factory

Russell Maroon Shoatz

There's a war going on in America.

Normally we can't see it because the enemy has laid down a heavy screen of smoke to maneuver behind. The enemy calls it a "war on poverty", "war on crime," "war on drugs" or a "war on childhood disease," and tomorrow they will make up another deceptive name. Hide they must, because our enemies fear the day that we realize that behind their rhetoric is an impoverished spirit: alienated from life, fearful of difference, greedy and confused.

There's no end to the manifestations of this legal war, if we only look. But under the enemy's bombardment most of us have become shell-shocked. For all too many of us it's just a matter of survival day to day. I cannot think of a better way to seal our own fate. Our enemy is trying to destroy our spirit of resistance, our spirit of life, our human soul. If we recognize this, we must resist. We must get others to resist and we must destroy this culture of death.

I have a warning for you: get up and do something about it before it gets any worse. I'm being housed in a death camp—I mean that literally, though our enemy has clouded the air with so much smoke about crime and prisons that many people may be blinded by it.

Our enemy calls this place SCIG, or "State Correctional Institution at Greene." I say SCIG stands for "State Concentration and Internment Ground," because nothing that resembles any 'correcting' goes on with most of the prisoners here. It's located in Greene County at Waynesburg, Pennsylvania: so far from Philly that driving past it you arrive in Morgantown, West Virginia before catching a new radio station.

Like the Nazi concentration camps, this is a death camp for sure. Our Brother Mumia Abu Jamal is locked up here, as well as over a hundred others who our enemy plans to kill. Although I'm not under a court sentence of death, for over twenty-five years I have been condemned to death by regulation—our enemy calls it a "natural life sentence."

Many of the men here will soon be released back into your communities. Yet even they are under a sentence of death—the spiritual death meted out by the prison overseers. The prison administration's only objective is to terrorize prisoners so that they will carry the message throughout the prisons in this state: "If you're sent to Greene County you ain't got nothing coming!" That's what the prisoners tell other prisoners.

If you think this sounds like a good "tough love" approach, you are being blinded by the enemy's smoke. SCI Greene contains a control unit called a "restricted housing unit." It's the largest control unit in the state, with a capacity of 772 (there are about 386 here at present). Here is where the spirit breaking takes place. Here is also where the court-ordered death sentences take place.

I've been in this Control Unit for close to five years, and I've been told I'll never be released into general population. A



would continue this song. In his bathroom-sized cell he had nothing to occupy his twenty-three hour days, except for the two Reader's Digests per week that he was allowed to order from the library. Five days per week he was allowed to exercise in a dog cage for an hour, and each week he was allowed to take three five-minute showers. The rest of the time was spent in his cell. That is the daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly routine for the majority of the men in this control unit.

Nearly everyone here is trapped in a twilight between life and death, a torture of nothingness that kills one's spirit and soul. Although the prisoners have 23 hours that they could use to read study and develop themselves, that is not allowed—beyond what they can learn from Reader's Digest or the other mindless material in the prison library. All other books that you order or have sent to you are stored away until your release from the control unit. If your relatives come to visit you, you are separated from them by bulletproof glass while you sit handcuffed to a waist belt for the one hour that is allowed.

Those who can't take this grind and refuse to follow one of the ever-changing petty rules will be condemned to more time in the control unit. Alternatively, they'll be beaten by the guards. The beatings start with the "initiation beating" most prisoners get as soon as they step in the door of the unit. Just last month the guards beat a prisoner named Henry Washington. One guard shoved a nightstick up his rectum. New York is not the only place that happens.

Our enemies are making very bitter men out of most of the prisoners here. Many will have become "monsters" by the time they eventually return to your communities—and most of these prisoners will indeed be returning.

If you don't do something to help them men when they get out, "You ain't got nothing coming!"

Defend Mumia
Abolish The Death Penalty
Free All Political Prisoners
and Prisoners Of War

Lethal Games in California's Corcoran Prison

TEXT:

Demian Johnson

December 7, 1998

from California State Prison Sacramento

ARTWORK:

Todd Tarselli

BY 8025

1040 E Roy Furman Hwy

Waynesburg PA 15370-8090

Living hell? No, this is America. Demian Johnson, now 33, has been in jail since the age of 18. Shock and horror were triggered by an *LA Times* article, published Sunday July 5, 1998, that revealed that 50 inmates were wounded or shot dead by guards in Corcoran prison. Below is Demian's chilling description of his experiences in Corcoran prison.

"I was convicted of 2nd degree murder and sentenced to state prison for 15 years – life. My case stems from an incident in which two associates and I planned to 'ditch' a cab driver [jump out and not pay the fare]. In the process, one of my associates shot and killed the cab driver. He was trying to discourage the driver from chasing us by pointing the gun at him. The gun accidentally discharged."

Thus started Demian's journey through the California Prison Industrial Complex. During his incarceration he has received his GED, completed 1195 hours of training as an airplane mechanic, and is currently enrolled in a correspondence course in BusinessMarketing. He is a board member of Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. He is also the executive secretary of the Inmate Advisory Committee which liaises with the prison warden about issues concerning prisoners and staff.

Demian married Lara in October of 1997 after they had corresponded for some time. Lara is a human rights activist and eternal optimist who grew up in South Africa. She campaigns tirelessly for Demian's release and dreams of returning to Volkrust, S.A. the day he is freed.

Serena Wood

A tortuous innovation: "The Hole"

The concept of a "prison within a prison" is almost as old as that of prison itself. It has taken on many forms, purposes, and names. There were the archaic "dungeons," "boxes," and "holes" that are no longer socially acceptable. About thirty years ago prison administrators and psychiatrists collaborated in an experiment to determine how prisoners' minds could be altered by altering their physical surroundings.¹ Born from this venture was the penological practice of "administrative segregation." The relatively old practice of inflicting psychological pain in order to change the thinking and behavior of certain prisoners, such as politicians, leaders, or gang members, has many contemporary designations, ranging from the appropriate - "Adjustment Centers" and "Control Units" - to the intentionally misleading - "Security Housing Unit."

In late 1989 a prison official wanted me to inform on gang members. I refused and was labeled a prison gang associate. As a result of this label I was sentenced to an "indeterminate" term in S.H.U.

Induction: "The Welcoming Committee"

I was being transported to Corcoran S.H.U. with about a dozen other prisoners who were being locked up for various reasons – gang affiliation, rule violation, psychiatric problems –

"Level II inmates," many of whom were sentenced to drug treatment programs, were a loud and restless bunch. It was obvious to the rest of us that these guys weren't aware of the fact that the transporting staff are among the most abusive of all prison guards. As the bus entered the grounds of Corcoran S.H.U., the transporting staff, who had recently warned us about what would happen if we continued to speak "above a whisper," informed the Level II inmates that they were going to get a demonstration of what happens to "tough guys."



When we pulled into the prison, I noticed a line of about 20 angry looking guards with bully clubs drawn, apparently waiting for us to disembark. While

Upon exiting the bus we were met by a Sergeant wielding a high powered tazer gun and two Correctional Officers wielding clubs. The Sergeant ordered me to look up at the sky. As I did so, he placed the tazer gun on my throat and warned that if I looked anywhere but up at the sky it would be taken as a "sign of aggression" and would result in my being "taken down." At that point the two Correctional Officers removed my waist manacles and handcuffed me behind my back. They escorted me roughly to the side of the bus. While I waited for the other prisoners to undergo the same treatment and be lined up on either side of me, my face was pressed up against the filthy, hot side of the bus that had been on the road for several hundred miles. One prisoner complained and was slammed to the ground by



several Correctional Officers and literally dragged off to an unknown location. Our handcuffs were locked to a long chain and we were escorted to our housing unit. On the way, we were constantly reminded of what would happen if we would look anywhere but up in the air. This was a painful position – I had a crick in my neck for two days after – and impossible to keep for any length of time. Because our cuffs were attached to the chain without much room in between each prisoner it was difficult to walk without stepping on the heels of the man in front of you – which, of course, would trigger another stream of threats and insults from the guards. Whenever we had to stop during an escort, we had to line up with our "noses and toes" touching the nearest wall. I made the mistake of turning my head so my face wouldn't make contact with a wall that was filthy with bird droppings, spider webs, and God only knows what else, and was whisked away to a dark corridor inside the housing unit. I was smashed up against a wall by two Correctional Officers who graphically described what they would do to me and how they would cover it up if I didn't learn quickly to follow their orders. I believed them. **There are infinite cases of prison staff criminally maiming and killing prisoners** and taking great measures to cover up their illegal acts. Some of these instances have been exposed via the media and court cases. Most go unheard and

Officer open the door, and rushed in. I heard what sounded like a body colliding with the concrete and steel furniture of the cell. This sound was followed by blood curdling screams, grunts, and moans. After about 10 minutes of this, the Correctional Officers emerged from the cell dragging a battered, bloodied, and bruised prisoner. I immediately recognized him: it was the guy from the bus who had complained. It was difficult to believe that these almost feminine screams emanated from a man who previously seemed so rebellious. In retrospect, however, it was easy to understand why he had had a sudden "attitude adjustment." The guy couldn't have weighed more than 130 pounds. However, each Correctional Officer had to be over 6'2" and weigh over 200 pounds. This guy didn't stand a chance because prisoners are not allowed to have physical contact with staff unless handcuffed.

A very unpoetic justice: "Tree Jumpers" and "Booty Bandits"

Guards had another way of dealing with undesirable prisoners. Sex offenders, especially pedophiles, already ostracized and brutalized by the general inmate population, were treated particularly heinously in S.H.U. by post guards and prisoners. They were referred to as "tree jumpers". Staff would put these prisoners in cells with other prisoners whom they knew would probably assault and/or rape them. Sometime guards would make arrangements with these assailants – referred to by prisoners as "booty bandits" – to trade some favor or other for their very dirty deeds.

On one occasion the Correctional Officers placed an alleged Tree Jumper in the cell with a known Booty Bandit. The Tree Jumper couldn't have weighed more than 115 pounds and was doing a relatively short sentence. The Booty Bandit had to weigh over twice as much, was doing a 100+ year sentence, and had a long history of sodomizing and assaulting his cell mates. Soon after this cell move, we were released to the exercise yard. I was informed by another prisoner that the Tree Jumper refused to go to the yard and informed staff that he would be harmed if he wasn't moved to another cell. I noticed this guy was still in the temporary holding cell on my way back to my cell from the yard. The Correctional Officer escorting me informed me that the guy was refusing to return to his cell. About 45 minutes after I returned to my cell I heard screaming. When I looked out my door, I noticed that two Correctional Officers were carrying the Tree Jumper. One Correctional Officer had hooked one of his arms – which were cuffed behind his back – and the other Correctional Officer was holding him by his ankles. **The man was screaming and pleading not to be placed back in the cell with the Booty Bandit.** The Correctional Officers

T
I
R
D
I
R
T
D
R
S

THE FORTRESS

THE FORTRESS

THE FORTRESS

THE FORTRESS



The design of the housing units – “blocks” – of Corcoran S.H.U. resembles a half a pie separated by walls into thirds. Each section contains two floors or tiers of about 12 cells. Each block has two exercise yards, which resemble a triangle with a wall running its length in the middle. At the narrow tip of the yard is a Control Booth, in which a Correctional Officer stands watch over the inhabitants with lethal and non-lethal weapons. The lethal weapon is a 9mm assault rifle that fires bullets that explode inside your body. The non-lethal weapon is a 37mm “gas gun” that fires wooden bullets that are painful and often cause serious injury: eye loss, concussion, broken bones, abrasions, contusions, trauma to the genitalia, etc. Because the yards are only about 15 yards long and about 10 yards wide at the widest point, the effect of firing is devastating. While I was at Corcoran over **50 inmates were shot, 7 killed, by guards** breaking up fights. This was more than all other prison systems combined during the same period.

When I first arrived at Corcoran S.H.U. the tiers and yards were segregated. The guards would assign Black and Northern Hispanic prisoners to one tier and White and Southern Hispanic prisoners to the other tier. In California these groups are traditional enemies. This kept the violence down to a minimum. Every now and then the staff would put someone in the wrong tier or yard. This was done intentionally to precipitate a violent incident on the yard. Sometimes this unlucky guy would be someone the guards didn't like and wanted to have harmed. **When the inevitable attack occurred the “victim,” more often than not, was shot at by the Control Booth Officer.** Other times the guards just wanted to watch a good fight. There were cameras positioned on the yard so that the incidents were videoed. Afterwards, guards would view the fights on a monitor in the Control Booth. They often bet on the outcome. Despite the probability of increased violence the administration officially decided to mix up the tiers and yards. They called it “Integrated S.H.U. Yard Program” and it resulted in an unprecedented amount of death and destruction. In addition to an unprecedented number of prisoners killed and maimed by guard gunfire, **Corcoran had an inmate assault rate five times that of the entire prison system** as a direct result of the Integrated Yard Policy.

Yard: The Gladiator Arena

The day my tier and yard were integrated was marked by tremendous fear and anxiety. There was no question, in the minds of prisoners and staff, that there was going to be violence. The Correctional

The design of the housing units – “blocks” – of Corcoran S.H.U. resembles a half a pie separated by walls into thirds. Each section contains two floors or tiers of about 12 cells. Each block has two exercise yards, which resemble a triangle with a wall running its length in the middle. At the narrow tip of the yard is a Control Booth, in which a Correctional Officer stands watch over the inhabitants with lethal and non-lethal weapons. The lethal weapon is a 9mm assault rifle that fires bullets that explode inside your body. The non-lethal weapon is a 37mm “gas gun” that fires wooden bullets that are painful and often cause serious injury: eye loss, concussion, broken bones, abrasions, contusions, trauma to the genitalia, etc. Because the yards are only about 15 yards long and about 10 yards wide at the widest point, the effect of firing is devastating. While I was at Corcoran over **50 inmates were shot, 7 killed, by guards** breaking up fights. This was more than all other prison systems combined during the same period.

When I first arrived at Corcoran S.H.U. the tiers and yards were segregated. The guards would assign Black and Northern Hispanic prisoners to one tier and White and Southern Hispanic prisoners to the other tier. In California these groups are traditional enemies. This kept the violence down to a minimum. Every now and then the staff would put someone in the wrong tier or yard. This was done intentionally to precipitate a violent incident on the yard. Sometimes this unlucky guy would be someone the guards didn't like and wanted to have harmed. **When the inevitable attack occurred the “victim,” more often than not, was shot at by the Control Booth Officer.** Other times the guards just wanted to watch a good fight. There were cameras positioned on the yard so that the incidents were videoed. Afterwards, guards would view the fights on a monitor in the Control Booth. They often bet on the outcome. Despite the probability of increased violence the administration officially decided to mix up the tiers and yards. They called it “Integrated S.H.U. Yard Program” and it resulted in an unprecedented amount of death and destruction. In addition to an unprecedented number of prisoners killed and maimed by guard gunfire, **Corcoran had an inmate assault rate five times that of the entire prison system** as a direct result of the Integrated Yard Policy.

Yard: The Gladiator Arena

The day my tier and yard were integrated was marked by tremendous fear and anxiety. There was no question, in the minds of prisoners and staff, that there was going to be violence. The Correctional

The design of the housing units – “blocks” – of Corcoran S.H.U. resembles a half a pie separated by walls into thirds. Each section contains two floors or tiers of about 12 cells. Each block has two exercise yards, which resemble a triangle with a wall running its length in the middle. At the narrow tip of the yard is a Control Booth, in which a Correctional Officer stands watch over the inhabitants with lethal and non-lethal weapons. The lethal weapon is a 9mm assault rifle that fires bullets that explode inside your body. The non-lethal weapon is a 37mm “gas gun” that fires wooden bullets that are painful and often cause serious injury: eye loss, concussion, broken bones, abrasions, contusions, trauma to the genitalia, etc. Because the yards are only about 15 yards long and about 10 yards wide at the widest point, the effect of firing is devastating. While I was at Corcoran over **50 inmates were shot, 7 killed, by guards** breaking up fights. This was more than all other prison systems combined during the same period.

When I first arrived at Corcoran S.H.U. the tiers and yards were segregated. The guards would assign Black and Northern Hispanic prisoners to one tier and White and Southern Hispanic prisoners to the other tier. In California these groups are traditional enemies. This kept the violence down to a minimum. Every now and then the staff would put someone in the wrong tier or yard. This was done intentionally to precipitate a violent incident on the yard. Sometimes this unlucky guy would be someone the guards didn't like and wanted to have harmed. **When the inevitable attack occurred the “victim,” more often than not, was shot at by the Control Booth Officer.** Other times the guards just wanted to watch a good fight. There were cameras positioned on the yard so that the incidents were videoed. Afterwards, guards would view the fights on a monitor in the Control Booth. They often bet on the outcome. Despite the probability of increased violence the administration officially decided to mix up the tiers and yards. They called it “Integrated S.H.U. Yard Program” and it resulted in an unprecedented amount of death and destruction. In addition to an unprecedented number of prisoners killed and maimed by guard gunfire, **Corcoran had an inmate assault rate five times that of the entire prison system** as a direct result of the Integrated Yard Policy.

Yard: The Gladiator Arena

The day my tier and yard were integrated was marked by tremendous fear and anxiety. There was no question, in the minds of prisoners and staff, that there was going to be violence. The Correctional

The design of the housing units – “blocks” – of Corcoran S.H.U. resembles a half a pie separated by walls into thirds. Each section contains two floors or tiers of about 12 cells. Each block has two exercise yards, which resemble a triangle with a wall running its length in the middle. At the narrow tip of the yard is a Control Booth, in which a Correctional Officer stands watch over the inhabitants with lethal and non-lethal weapons. The lethal weapon is a 9mm assault rifle that fires bullets that explode inside your body. The non-lethal weapon is a 37mm “gas gun” that fires wooden bullets that are painful and often cause serious injury: eye loss, concussion, broken bones, abrasions, contusions, trauma to the genitalia, etc. Because the yards are only about 15 yards long and about 10 yards wide at the widest point, the effect of firing is devastating. While I was at Corcoran over **50 inmates were shot, 7 killed, by guards** breaking up fights. This was more than all other prison systems combined during the same period.

When I first arrived at Corcoran S.H.U. the tiers and yards were segregated. The guards would assign Black and Northern Hispanic prisoners to one tier and White and Southern Hispanic prisoners to the other tier. In California these groups are traditional enemies. This kept the violence down to a minimum. Every now and then the staff would put someone in the wrong tier or yard. This was done intentionally to precipitate a violent incident on the yard. Sometimes this unlucky guy would be someone the guards didn't like and wanted to have harmed. **When the inevitable attack occurred the “victim,” more often than not, was shot at by the Control Booth Officer.** Other times the guards just wanted to watch a good fight. There were cameras positioned on the yard so that the incidents were videoed. Afterwards, guards would view the fights on a monitor in the Control Booth. They often bet on the outcome. Despite the probability of increased violence the administration officially decided to mix up the tiers and yards. They called it “Integrated S.H.U. Yard Program” and it resulted in an unprecedented amount of death and destruction. In addition to an unprecedented number of prisoners killed and maimed by guard gunfire, **Corcoran had an inmate assault rate five times that of the entire prison system** as a direct result of the Integrated Yard Policy.

Yard: The Gladiator Arena

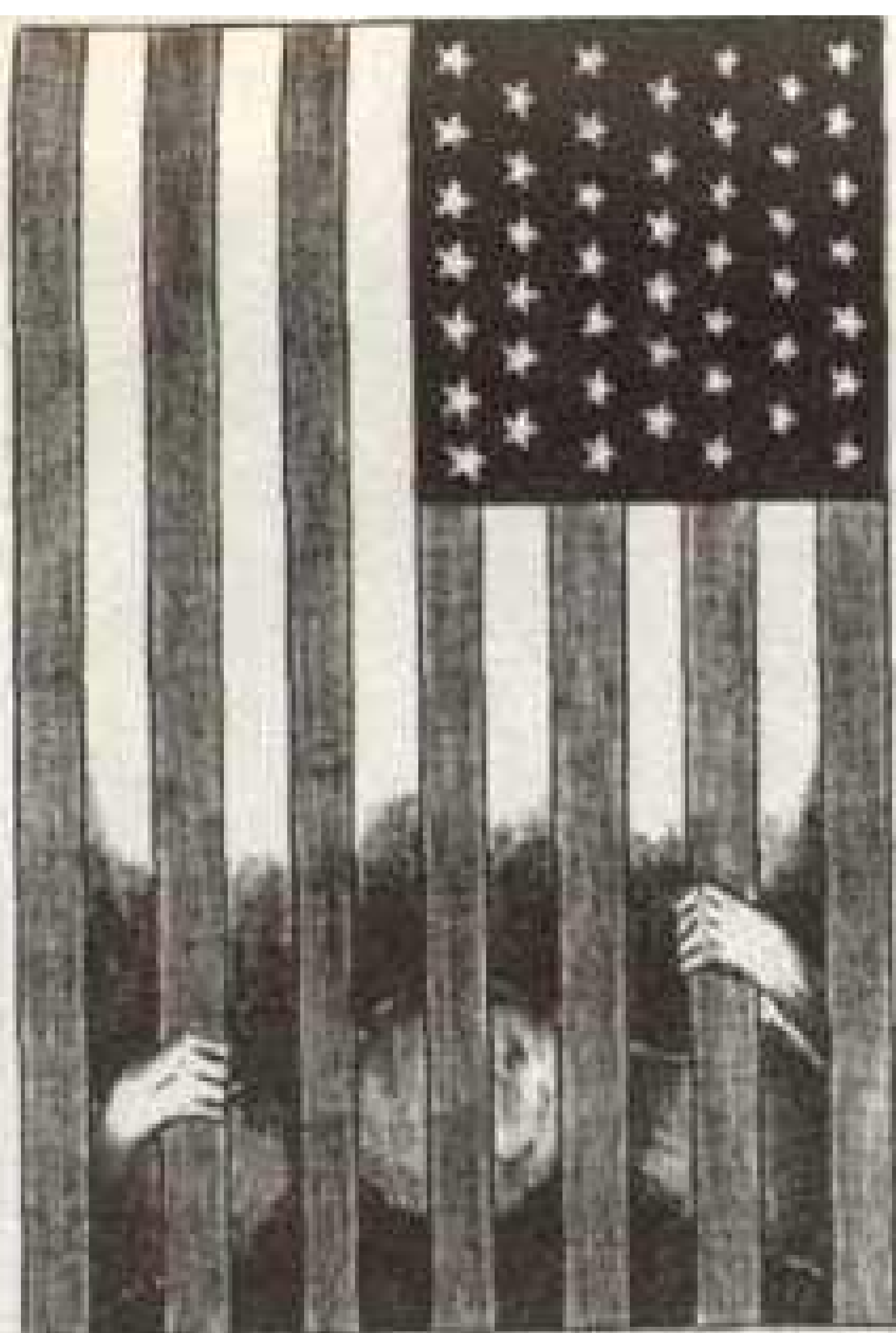
The day my tier and yard were integrated was marked by tremendous fear and anxiety. There was no question, in the minds of prisoners and staff, that there was going to be violence. The Correctional

The design of the housing units – “blocks” – of Corcoran S.H.U. resembles a half a pie separated by walls into thirds. Each section contains two floors or tiers of about 12 cells. Each block has two exercise yards, which resemble a triangle with a wall running its length in the middle. At the narrow tip of the yard is a Control Booth, in which a Correctional Officer stands watch over the inhabitants with lethal and non-lethal weapons. The lethal weapon is a 9mm assault rifle that fires bullets that explode inside your body. The non-lethal weapon is a 37mm “gas gun” that fires wooden bullets that are painful and often cause serious injury: eye loss, concussion, broken bones, abrasions, contusions, trauma to the genitalia, etc. Because the yards are only about 15 yards long and about 10 yards wide at the widest point, the effect of firing is devastating. While I was at Corcoran over **50 inmates were shot, 7 killed, by guards** breaking up fights. This was more than all other prison systems combined during the same period.

When I first arrived at Corcoran S.H.U. the tiers and yards were segregated. The guards would assign Black and Northern Hispanic prisoners to one tier and White and Southern Hispanic prisoners to the other tier. In California these groups are traditional enemies. This kept the violence down to a minimum. Every now and then the staff would put someone in the wrong tier or yard. This was done intentionally to precipitate a violent incident on the yard. Sometimes this unlucky guy would be someone the guards didn't like and wanted to have harmed. **When the inevitable attack occurred the “victim,” more often than not, was shot at by the Control Booth Officer.** Other times the guards just wanted to watch a good fight. There were cameras positioned on the yard so that the incidents were videoed. Afterwards, guards would view the fights on a monitor in the Control Booth. They often bet on the outcome. Despite the probability of increased violence the administration officially decided to mix up the tiers and yards. They called it “Integrated S.H.U. Yard Program” and it resulted in an unprecedented amount of death and destruction. In addition to an unprecedented number of prisoners killed and maimed by guard gunfire, **Corcoran had an inmate assault rate five times that of the entire prison system** as a direct result of the Integrated Yard Policy.

Yard: The Gladiator Arena

The day my tier and yard were integrated was marked by tremendous fear and anxiety. There was no question, in the minds of prisoners and staff, that there was going to be violence. The Correctional



OPPRESSION

of. On the way to the yard, I looked up at the Control Booth and noticed the presence of a Lieutenant, a Sergeant, and two Correctional Officers in addition to the two Correctional Officers who were usually there. The Sergeant carried the 37mm gas gun and both the Lieutenant and a Correctional Officer carried 9mm assault rifles. Prior to entering the yard, I overheard someone in the Control Booth say, "So what do you think?" Another voice answered, "I don't know, just make it five." Apparently, they didn't think I was made of much. Although this did little for my ego and even less for my courage, I was more concerned about getting shot.

When I entered the yard I proceeded all the way to the farthest end, away from the Control Booth. This way, if the gas gun were discharged, the impact of the wooden projectiles wouldn't be as injurious. Shots are always fired in these incidents and I silently prayed it wouldn't be from the 9mm. The southern Hispanic prisoner entered the yard soon after I did and rushed toward me. Watching his countenance and velocity, I braced myself for the inevitable. I was determined not to get any disciplinaries, so I decided to follow the Classification Committee's instructions. I raised my hands in a defensive posture and took two steps back. This guy punched me in the head and was making slashing motions. He had a razor! As I ducked and dodged blows and slashes, I wondered why the Control Booth staff wasn't doing or saying anything to quell the attack. I looked up momentarily and observed that the Control Booth staff was attentively watching the battle. Just then I was slashed – I still have the scar.³ My instincts took over and I mounted a vicious defense. As I did so I heard an explosion and

wooden projectiles. I was also issued a disciplinary for "Assault & Battery" as a result of this incident. After this happened a few more times – a guard told me that he actually shot me for not fighting – I no longer saw following the Committee's instructions as an option. I ended up spending almost four years in Corcoran S.H.U. where I accumulated numerous disciplinaries from literally fighting to survive. I was recently denied parole, in part because of the numerous disciplinaries I incurred at Corcoran S.H.U. I was finally released from S.H.U. after threatening to sue officials for my wrongful confinement to S.H.U. and the injuries I sustained during this time. Since my release from S.H.U. almost five years ago, I haven't been involved in any physical altercations and have worked with many prisoners who were previously considered my enemies to reduce the violence in the prison setting. Next month I plan on filing my lawsuit, in which I'll be seeking another parole hearing among other things. I was interviewed by the FBI a few months ago concerning my experiences at Corcoran S.H.U. As of the writing, several staff have been disciplined and indicted on criminal charges.



¹ One of the architects of this practice has since become one of its staunchest and most vocal critics. Social Psychologist and Criminologist Dr. Richard Korn is someone for whom I have tremendous respect and have come to regard as a very dear friend.

² Guards control the doors and provide gun coverage to the unit and exercise yards from Control Booths, which are built into each housing unit.

³ I've suffered many physical and psychological scars from existing in this environment. When I sought psychiatric counseling to help me deal with S.H.U. induced stress, I was told that the department didn't provide

T
I
R
D
I
R
T
O
R
S



Assata Shakur began her political activities in the 1960s while she was going to school in Manhattan and organizing activities to oppose the Vietnam War.

She joined the Panthers and was targeted by COINTELPRO around the time when NYC's "Panther 21" were accused of conspiring to blow up downtown department stores. Assata's house was searched and she was continually harassed.

The FBI offered immunity if she would cooperate with them, but she decided to go

underground. This resulted in a nationwide manhunt led by the NYC police, the FBI, and the *Daily News*. There was a reward for her capture, dead or alive. She was wanted for several bank robberies, for which she was eventually tried and acquitted more than once.

In May 1973, during a shootout on the New Jersey Turnpike, Assata was shot with her hands in the air and left to die. When the cops realized that she wasn't dying she was taken to a Jersey hospital. She was chained to the bed, tortured, and denied access to lawyers for many days. After being tried by an all-white jury she was sentenced to life, 30 months, and 30 days.

With the help of other anti-imperialist activists she escaped from prison and now lives in exile in Cuba. She firmly believes, as do Mumia and many others, that the US does not have a justice system, but a criminal system.

(For a sweet Afro-Asian jazz opera about Assata, see Fred Ho's *Warrior Sisters*, a track from which is on the enclosed Blu-3 cd.)

Assata breaks it down:

Q: Where do you think the Movement—the struggle for justice—is heading, and how do you think it could or should go forward?

Assata: Well, from my perspective, in the 1960s and 70s we talked at people; we were very narrow; we were sectarian. We relied on rallies, on passing out leaflets, on trying to organize people. This was necessary, but I think, looking back, that now we need to humanize the Movement. We need to be much broader; **we need to have a more creative vision** that includes other people and other people's needs.

We need to include children; we need to make space to help them be part of the social change. At Party meetings the kids were always in the back playing games at the table, and we'd shush them up. We had no time for them! We need to get to know each other as human beings; to care about whether people are having problems at home, in their families, and so on.

If we are going to change the world, we need to change ourselves and the way we relate to each other. People are so alienated. They are afraid to say good morning to each other, to say hi, to look at each other in the elevator. It's hell. There's really no community at all. Yet everybody is talking about community.

How do you organize community if there is no community there? Social and revolutionary change is not about the faceless masses. It's about community—about learning from each other and listening to each other, because all of us, no matter how experienced we think we are, have a lot to learn.

Our primary task is to build community in our homes, in our work places, and in our immediate neighborhoods. That's the only way we will ever achieve true revolution in our society. We've been socialized to believe that unless we see what we do on the 6:00 news, it's not worth

it. Forget it. There's been a basic news blackout of worthwhile progressive/alternative stories since 1970. A dog with three ears will make the news, but a gathering of 10,000 for a political rally won't: that's not regarded as a legitimate story. So don't worry about the news. Just keep your sense of opposition alive. Keep talking, and keep organizing. Also, focus on local happenings. I know it's a cliché, but "think globally, act locally" is an important piece of advice. We have to act locally if we're going to be effective. Of course, there's always the problem of splintering, and we need to organize nationally whenever we can.

I won't romanticize the sixties, but it does seem that today's rampant individualism is making it harder than ever to organize. Everything is so separate, so contradictory. There's so little discipline. Society teaches us a dog-eat-dog, me-first mentality. And even if we reject that attitude in our politics, if we're honest with ourselves we have to admit that every one of us acts like this at one time or another on a personal level, even if subconsciously. So the first part of being an activist, in my experience, is changing the person in the mirror. You cannot be dogmatic and talk all the time, also as a group. You cannot always be trying to spread your message to other people. **You need to listen, you need to learn**, you need to appreciate others—also their differences.

Oppressed people are wounded people. They're disrespected every day. They may be angry, but you have to listen to them. Some times they're misunderstood because they take out their anger and their indignities on each other, in their families; this happens a lot in our black communities. We need to be healed, also on a spiritual level. In the US this was not a possibility for me, but in Cuba it is. **If you're black or poor, the US is a war zone.** Cuba is the first place I've been able to live in peace.

Q: Is there something that could hold us together? So many people are fighting the same injustices, but they often work against each other.

Assata: **Work for unity. But avoid uniformity.** Look instead for ways to connect. And don't look for unity to shine down like a light from above. Unity is born from within. Not everybody in the world is going to have the same vision. There will always be divisive issues; we won't all be liberated in the same way. But even if we disagree with each other, we need to respect each other's viewpoints. After all, we're all trying to work for a better future.

Q: What do you think about the increasing materialism in society?

Assata: **Consumerism is destroying our world.** Everyone has so many clothes, so many things, but they're lonely. They have no one to live with, laugh with, cry with. People are going crazy, totally crazy. They sacrifice travel, relationships, the outdoors—they won't even take time for walks—because of their materialism. It's growing here in Cuba, too, this mentality.

Why not **value the precious things of life—children, family, nature?** A car is a means of transport. It can only take you from point A to point B. Why then spend \$20,000 for a stupid status symbol? Or brand-name sneakers. Will they walk to the kitchen and make soup for you when you're sick? Or these huge gold chains people are buying and wearing around their necks (though they can't even wear them, except in the house, because it's too dangerous to display them on the street). Will these chains talk to you when you're lonely?

Q: Do you have a message for young people in the US?

Assata: Yes. Become more conscious of your identity in the sense of assuming leadership and responsibility. Know your strengths and weaknesses. I'm not saying we need the macho, talking-head type of leadership I saw in the Movement in the 1960s. That had too much to do with the ego and its contradictions. People would say one thing on the podium and then go home and do the opposite. They'd be for freedom in public, but at home they'd be the oppressor—the bourgeoisie. But you have to have confidence.

As the '90s started, I was depressed. Seemed it was just going to be the end of one more bloody, oppressive century. **But there is hope. And doesn't the next century belong to you?**

**La Habana
Cuba**

**Fourteenth
Youth Festival**

August 3, 1997
Chris Zim for blu