

MISSOURI WINTER HAPPENINGS // JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2014

A PRISONER NEWSLETTER FOR MISSOURI AND BEYOND



PROTECTION FROM DRUDGERY

COMBATING THE ISOLATION OF PRISON LIFE

Challenging your brain to learn new tasks can help to disrupt the limitations and controlled surroundings of prison life. It can help provide movement for your emotional state, which in turn can allow your body to feel more alive.

1. Try to include one or more of your senses in an everyday task such as closing your eyes while you eat or getting dressed with your eyes closed.
2. Try combining two senses like watching the clouds and tapping your fingers or smelling food while listening to the rain.
3. Try to break routines. You could try to eat, write or draw with your non-dominant hand.



LET US KNOW HOW THE EXPERIMENT GOES FOR YOU, IF YOU WANT!

“We are all in the gutter,
but some of us are
looking at the stars.”

OSCAR WILDE

INTRODUCTION



On the outside, we may walk the streets and, on a good day, converse with loved ones, but we do not consider ourselves free as long as there is one living thing locked in a cage.

On some days it has been us, a friend or a lover criminalized, stolen and locked up in jail or prison, and in this police state it may be any of us again. It is out of our rage and desire for a world without cages that we write and compile this newsletter. It is not as “allies” or “supporters” that we reach out to you, as if we never have nor could be locked away, but as people fighting and dreaming of another world and looking for others who are as well.

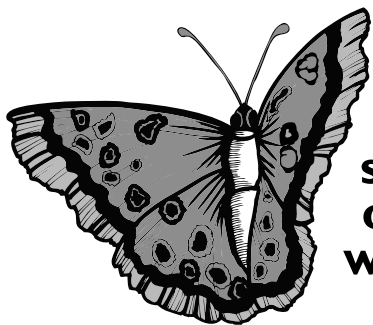
We want this newsletter to be a joyous sound that

drowns out the constant noise or bursts through the bleak silence with both the history and the ongoing news showing signs of discontent and possibility. There is more for us than the bullshit that surrounds us. In every time and every place, those held captive have resisted, and in our resistance we can find joy and meaning that makes life worth living.

As the odds are never in our favor, we hope you, like us, can find people around you to mirror your dreams for a world without social and economic control, without prisons, cops or bosses. In those moments where despair tries to set in, we can know that together we are not alone.



“...Prison is not an abuse of power, it is not an exception, it is normal. The State builds prisons so that it can put us in them. In so doing it is not doing anything strange, it is simply doing its job. The State is not a prison State, it is the State, that’s all. In the same way that it expresses itself through economic and social activity, political management and the management of free time, it deals with the management of prison. These elements are not separate, it is impossible to talk about prison on its own, it wouldn’t make sense because it would be taking one element out of context.”



Alfredo M. Bonanno, *Locked Up*
Available by request from Oak Root Press

BACK IN '54 . . .

In September, 1954, a riot broke out at the now-defunct Missouri State Penitentiary in Jeff City. During the course of the twenty-four hours the prison was under inmate control, seven buildings on the prison compound were set on fire and totally destroyed, causing an estimated five million dollars in damage. Among the buildings destroyed were the prison school and three buildings that housed prison industries where inmates were forced to work. During the riot, inmate-on-inmate violence was virtually non-existent, apart from the killing of one notorious snitch. Stories such as this one serve to remind us that no cage is strong enough to hold us all forever.

What follows are excerpts from an article that first appeared in the Missouri Historical Review, under the title "The 1954 Missouri Prison Riot and the Image of the Highway Patrol." Despite its obvious pro-cop bias, the article remains the most in-depth history of the riot we were able to find.

Prison riots had become commonplace throughout the country during the early 1950's. Between 1950 and 1956, an average of one riot per month occurred in the nation.

Conditions at the more than one hundred-year-old Missouri facility had been volatile for some time. Grossly overcrowded, the prison housed 3,285 inmates on the day the riot occurred, almost 10 percent more than the average daily number incarcerated in 1953 and roughly 1,300 more than [were] in the facility [in 1989]. In addition to overcrowding, the inmates had several other criticisms about their living conditions. They complained about the food they received, both the quality and the preparation. A guard held hostage for several hours, said that the inmates "griped about cheap food poorly prepared. They told me all they were getting was 'beans, beans, and beans.'"

The prisoners also complained that penitentiary officials relied too much on "snitches" and "stool pigeons" for inmate control.





A third complaint, the one heard most consistently, involved the number of state patrol personnel in the top ranks of the correctional system, the prison and the parole board. Indeed, the director of the Department of Corrections, the warden and all three members of the parole board had previously been identified with the patrol. Inmates blamed the patrol-dominated parole board for the sharp decrease in paroles granted during the preceding years.

[The riot began at] about 4:30pm, [when] third-floor inmate Don DeLapp broke a faucet in his cell. A guard came to see what had happened, then went to get a plumber, who fixed the faucet and left. The guard opened the cell door again, and according to DeLapp, "As he open the door, I shove the door all the way back and shove him..." The guard stumbled backwards, his keys still stuck in the door. DeLapp grabbed the keys and ran and opened another man's cell. That inmate, in turn, began opening additional cells. Inmates then left the cell block and moved to other parts of the prison, unlocking more cell doors and starting fires. The riot had begun.

Norman Lee Blodgett, serving a life sentence for murder from Saline County, typified many inmates' actions and attitudes. A week after the riot, Blodgett told authorities, "The first thing I knew the doors flew open and guys said come on out they are having a riot and I came on out and went downstairs." He milled around with others in his cell block for about twenty minutes before he decided to leave the building.

Blodgett and a group of prisoners first went to the

kitchen, where they "messed up a bit." They then proceeded to "the little place where they keep gas and bloke down that door and took gas out and put it in a bucket." Blodgett went "to the old building where they keep the hay and stuff and couldn't get in so I threw bucket and all, right through a window and lit it with a match."

Having ignited one building, Blodgett returned to get more gas. He then set the pants shop afire because "they tried to make me work out there and run a tom cat, I was jut mad at the pants shop. I had just made up my mind to burn it down the first chance I got. While I was at it I decided to burn down the other building."

By 6:30 between five hundred and six hundred prisoners were "hurling bricks, yelling and cursing." Fires had been started in the school building, the clothing building and the tag and twine factories.

Although short-lived, the riot was a rare moment in which power inside of a prison was totally inverted. For once, inmates were free to express their rage toward the walls that held them, the jobs they hated, the guards and prison administrators who treated them like shit, and even the snitches who chose to destroy their friends' lives in exchange for a few extra scraps from the master's table. The guards, usually confident of their power to beat and torture inmates with impunity, feared they might get what they knew was coming to them. The prisoners, tired of issuing demands, found that the only real solution to their incarceration lay in the scorched bricks of a collapsed prison building.

A LITANY FOR SURVIVAL

BY AUDRE LOURDE

For those of us who live at the shoreline
standing upon the constant edges of decision
crucial and alone
for those of us who cannot indulge
the passing dreams of choice
who love in doorways coming and going
in the hours between dawns
looking inward and outward
at once before and after
seeking a now that can breed
futures
like bread in our children's mouths
so their dreams will not reflect
the death of ours

For those of us
who were imprinted with fear
like a faint line in the center of our foreheads
learning to be afraid without our mother's milk
for by this weapon
this illusion of some safety to be found
the heavy-footed hoped to silence us

For all of us
this instant and this triumph
We were never meant to survive
And when the sun rises we are afraid
it might not remain
when the sun sets we are afraid
it might not rise in the morning
when our stomachs are full we are afraid
of indigestion
when our stomachs are empty we are afraid
we may never eat again
when we are loved we are afraid
love will vanish
when we are alone we are afraid
love will never return
and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid

So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive



INCARCERATION NEWS DIGEST

This section is for informational purposes only. It is syndicated from major news media outlets in the United States.

Officials at Gulf Coast Treatment Center juvenile detention facility in Ft. Walton Beach, Florida reported rioting youth there threw chairs, flipped tables, damaged jail property, and used a seized staffer's radio to communicate with guards.

-Associated Press, September 15

Upset over the current grievance officer, inadequate sanitary supplies, no programs for prisoners in long-term segregation, and a poor recreation environment, 22 prisoners at Pontiac Correctional Center in Illinois went on hunger strike.

-WJBD Radio, October 15

Fifteen inmates at Potosi Correctional Center in Missouri went on a week-long hunger strike to protest neglect, sanitation issues, and physical abuse by guards. Thirty-five inmates there also signed a petition in support of the strikers' cause.

-San Francisco Bay View, November 17

Frustrated inmates in C-Pod at Baxter County Jail in Mountain Home, Arkansas broke sprinkler heads, lights, and a window, and flooded their cells.

-The Baxter Bulletin, November 21

Protesting a policy limiting the number of prisoners allowed in the yard at one time, 33 prisoners at Nebraska State Penitentiary in Lincoln refuse to return to their cells after dinner and set small fires in trash cans.

-KHAS TV, December 3

Two dozen inmates at Santa Clara County Jail in California launched a week-long hunger strike protesting the reduction of visiting hours.

-San Jose Mercury News, December 19

Continued . . .

In October, frustrated inmates at Strafford County Jail in New Hampshire, refused to return to their cells, damaged property, erected barricades, and threw objects at responding corrections officers.

-The Boston Globe, December 29

Officials reported that since Jan. 1, prisoners at four Alabama State Correctional facilities (St. Clair, Holman, Elmore, and Donaldson) refused to work in kitchen and laundry areas and perform other jobs because of unsanitary conditions, overcrowding, small pay, and an unfair court system.

-The Montgomery Advertiser, January 6

ON THE OUTSIDE:

Police in riot gear pushed back demonstrators who banged on the windows of the St. Louis downtown jail and threw trash in its lobby. Demonstrators were upset over the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the killing of Trayvon Martin in Florida and over the arrest of a fellow demonstrator during an earlier march through downtown.

-KSDK St. Louis, July 14

Over the last month, in solidarity with the hunger strikers in California state prisons, demonstrations (with many family and friends of inmates) took place in the California cities of Norwalk, Bakersfield, Los Angeles, San Jose, Eureka, and in Oakland, where thirteen were arrested for blocking access to the state building. Elsewhere, rallies occurred in New York City, Iowa, and Chicago.

-NBC News & The New York Times, August 7

Sixty protesters attempt to block buses leaving the Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention facility in Fairfax County, Virginia. The buses hold undocumented immigrant prisoners en route to their deportation.

-Washington Times, December 16

Six people were arrested after chaining themselves to the doors of the Butler County (Ohio) jail to protest the detention of undocumented immigrants held inside.

-Dayton Daily News, December 19

Seventy protesters march to the Fresno County Jail and block the entrance in protest of the jail's cooperation with federal authorities to carry out deportations.

-The Fresno Bee, December 23

On Christmas Day, dozens noisily protest against the mass incarceration of prisoners outside Harris County Jail in Houston, Texas.

-CW39, December 26

Outside the downtown Oakland jail, protesters rung in the New Year with fireworks and chants. Inmates inside responded by banging on the windows facing the street.

-San Francisco Chronicle, January 1

A dozen people marched behind a banner reading, "Prison makes war on the poor" to the downtown jail in Omaha, Nebraska. There, they set off fireworks and whistled loudly to bring in the new year. Prisoners inside responded by waving and banging on their windows.

-Omaha World-Herald, January 1

WRITE TO US

IF YOU WANT TO RECEIVE A ZINE CATALOG//
BE ADDED OR REMOVED FROM THE MAILING
LIST//TELL US WHAT'S GOING ON WHERE YOU
ARE OR WHAT YOU WANT TO HEAR ABOUT!

OAK ROOT PRESS
PO BOX 775006
ST LOUIS, MO 63177

We do not know anything about the law so we cannot help with legal support. We are also not a dating service. So please do not ask us for those kind of things. If you are a rapist of any kind, and you don't think that is a problem, do not bother writing to us. We dream of a world where rapists, along with prisons, do not exist.

