

# ACTIVITIES FOR PRISONERS

A SELF-CARE PUBLICATION FOR PRISONERS • APRIL - MAY 2014

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## PARLOR GAME

### "IN THE MANNER OF THE ADVERB"

*A parlor game is a group game played indoors. It is a fun way to engage your friends and pass the time. Often requiring no more than a few scraps of paper and a sense of humor, these games are perfect for the prison environment. You can play them in large or small groups. "In the Manner of the Adverb" is but one of many of these games. Here are the instructions.*

**Step #1:** Choose one or two people to leave the room or plug their ears. They will be the guesser(s).

**Step #2:** Everyone else stays in the room and quietly chooses one adverb (any word that ends in "ly," like clumsily, loudly, nervously...).

**Step #3:** The guesser(s) is invited back into the room and asks someone to do something in the manner of the adverb. For example, "Shake someone's hand in the manner of the adverb," or "Brush your teeth in the manner of the adverb," etc. That someone would then shake someone's hand or (pretend to) brush their teeth in the manner of the adverb.

**Step #4:** Each time the guesser(s) asks someone to do something, the guesser(s) can guess what the adverb might be. Continue until they guess what the adverb is.

**Step #5:** After successfully guessing the adverb, another player steps out of the room and a new adverb is chosen.



## FUN ANIMAL FACT

Rats have empathy for each other. In a famous 1958 experiment, hungry rats that were only fed if they pulled a lever to shock their littermates refused to do so, suggesting that the rodents have a sense of empathy and compassion for their fellows. Another study published in 2006 in the journal *Science* found that mice, too, would grimace when their compatriots were in pain if they knew the mouse personally.

Then in 2011, in a simple experiment, researchers at the University of Chicago found that a rat would release a fellow rat from an unpleasantly restrictive cage if it could. The study showed that rats preferred freeing caged rats rather than eating food placed in the cage. The free rat, occasionally hearing distress calls from its compatriot, learned to open the cage and did so with greater efficiency over time. It would release the other animal even if there wasn't the payoff of a reunion with it. Astonishingly, if given access to a small hoard of chocolate chips, the free rat would usually save at least one treat for the captive. Sometimes after liberation, the rats nuzzled and explored the experimental arena.



## For Fear of Being Called

by Marilyn Buck  
February 1996

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

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

Why do we allow  
capitalists and congressmen  
who don't care if we live or die  
to rob us of our language  
to intimidate us into cutting out  
our tongues

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

# HEY THERE

Well, it feels as if we are on the cusp of spring here in St. Louis. After several days of fierce wind and rain due to tornadoes in the area, the sun is out and warming our wintered faces. We see signs of Spring in the budding peach and plum trees, in the magenta magnolia flowers just opening up, and too, as the robins hop in and out of our garden beds. We wonder what you can see from inside those walls that energizes you to not give up, to resist, to stay strong.

We hope the warmer weather helps to awaken you as it is us.

The articles we've chosen to reprint this month offer glimmers of hope from the past when groups of prisoners have worked together to improve their conditions, or express their anger over their confinement. In 1968, in the St. Louis City Jail, prisoners came together to vent their rage at the murder of Martin Luther King Jr. In 1970 in the Federal Pen. in Terre Haute, Indiana, prisoners overcame racial differences to work together against a common enemy. These are not isolated moments in history, but connected points on an ever-expanding web of resistance stretching back thousands of years and connecting to us here in this present moment.

Sean Swain then offers us an analysis of solitary confinement, deepening our understanding of these conditions so we might find a more complex response to it. How common is solitary confinement in Missouri and Illinois? We know from connections made during the recent hunger strike at Menard Correctional in Illinois that solitary confinement is the norm for those prisoners. What about at Potosi? We've received almost no feedback from folks at Potosi on the newsletter. Are ya'll hearing us? We're also looking for stories and experiences of the riots there in 2004.

News has reached us, via comrades in Kansas City, that prisoners in Potosi have been facing abuse, medical neglect and torture from a group of prison guards calling themselves "the cowboys." Inmates there know that it is only by working and acting together and deepening our connections between those inside and outside of prison that we can find effective solutions to these problems.

Please send us feedback, and let us know you received the newsletter. We might not get back to you right away, but hearing from you makes all the difference.





## A Liberatory Approach to Maintaining Mental Health While In Prison

by Sean Swain

*“Rehabilitation never offered mental health, just the reverse. It involves communication only with staff who are not worth any contact at all. To listen to their philosophy, or accept their outlook will destroy you...”*

—Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*

Segregation and isolation are trauma. It hurts. This is the reality of it. What you are experiencing is designed to be painful. The State, the authorities, the ones who keep you locked up, have designed a system, and have perfected that system, for causing you trauma. In fact, the government has written books and manuals on it. These manuals were written in order to teach the people who keep you locked up so they can use, “the principle coercive techniques”<sup>1</sup> of “arrest, detention, deprivation of sensory stimuli through solitary confinement..., threats and fear...” What this means is, the ones who keep you locked up will use a combination of these things in order to cause a response from you. The response they want to cause is “debility, dependence, and dread.” “Debility” means the opposite of “ability.” Debility is, in a sense, making someone worse, breaking them in some way. “Dependence” is the opposite of “independence.” Dependence is where you can’t do for yourself any more, and you must count on someone else to do for you. “Dread” is like fear, only it also means to lose hope.

So the reality of your situation is, the people in charge have figured out the method for turning you into someone less able, broken, and hopeless, all by putting you through conditions that are very painful. As the process continues, “day after day if necessary, the subject begins to try to make sense of the situation, which becomes mentally intolerable.” “Intolerable” means you can’t stand it. Your situation is designed to cause “the maximum amount of discomfort...” In this “mentally intolerable” situation you face, a situation designed to cause “the maximum amount of discomfort,” it deprives your mind of “contact with an outer world and thus forcing it in on itself...” The trauma you experience “after weeks or months of imprisonment in an ordinary cell can be duplicated in hours or days” in isolation. As the CIA

manual concludes, describing the conditions of confinement you will experience in segregation and maximum security, “...in the simple torture situation, the contest is one between the individual and his tormentor...”

This is not presented to shock you or to scare you. It is presented so that you can have a clear idea of what you face. Only by seeing reality as it is can you react to it in a way that makes the most sense for you. You have to see what you face and what it is designed to do to you, and when you know that, when you can see it for what it is, you are better equipped to respond to it.

Whatever you did to come to prison (or didn’t do), and whatever you did to go to segregation or level 4 (or didn’t do), you are in the custody of people who want to make your life “mentally intolerable,” and they are putting you through “the simple torture situation.”

They know that what they are doing to you will not make you a better person. They are not doing this to you to “help” you or to “reform” you. This is designed to destroy you. This is very important to know, because it can guide your approach to this trauma, this “simple torture situation,” if you recognize that you are *not* being “corrected,” i.e., made better, but you are being debilitated, i.e., made worse.

It is a necessary and healthy thing to call something what it really is. The words we use have an influence on *how we see things*. When you use words, even in your head, like “corrections officer,” and “inmate,” you create a picture of “correcting,” a picture of an *offender* who has offended; but when you use the same words, even if just in your head, that are used by the very same people who wrote the manuals and designed this system, you see a “tormentor” and a “subject,” you see a “simple torture situation” that involves a torturer and a victim...

<sup>1</sup>All quotes in text taken from the KUBARK Counterintelligence Interrogation Manual prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency.

Sean Swain is an anarchist prisoner held captive by the state of Ohio for more than twenty years. The full zine, entitled *The Colonizer’s Corpse*, is available by request from Oak Root Press.



**KING SLAYING SPARKS NEGRO RIOT AT JAIL**  
 by Richard Lott and Charles Oswald  
 Globe-Democrat Staff Writers  
 April 5th, 1968

The assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King touched off a riot by 96 Negro prisoners in the City Jail at 8:30 p.m. Thursday, authorities reported. Police used tear gas to quell the rioters on the fifth floor of the jail at Clark avenue and 14th street. Warden A.J. Graves said damage was extensive, including a broken television set on which the inmates had received news of Dr. King's death.

**SMALL FIRES**

They ripped out plumbing, electrical wiring and fixtures and broke windows. Several small fires were started, but did not spread. Police had the riot under control by 10 p.m., and removed rioters to holdover cells of the Central Police District. Two were taken to City Hospital, one suffering a cut foot and the other complaining of stomach pains, police reported.

Arthur J. Kennedy, city director of public safety, said the riot was due to "years of frustration and denial for the Negroes." He said the disorder started when Negro prisoners started yelling, "They've killed our leader."

**DENIED RIGHTS**

Mr. Kennedy declared that Negroes are denied equal rights in courts and cannot afford lawyer, so they are made to sit and wait for trial. The overcrowding of City Jail was partly to blame, he said. He added that he anticipated trouble at the jail following Dr. King's murder, and said that the superintendent of City Workhouse "is presently sitting on a powder keg."

The Mobile Reserve was summoned shortly after the riot started. They started using tear gas at 9:35 p.m. to subdue the rioters. During the riot, smoke was observed in the northeast side of the jail. Firemen were called to the jail, but he blaze caused only minor damage. They later used ventilating fans to clear the gas from the building.

**PRISONERS TRANSFERRED**

Police brought out the prisoners, many of them with clothes torn, coughing and crying from the tear gas. They were handcuffed with their hands behind their backs, and were loaded into police cruisers for transportation to holdover cells.

As they were brought out of the jail, several prisoners shouted obscene remarks to police and reporters. They declared they would restart the riot. Police kept a tight security on the jail, during and after the riot, refusing to permit newsmen to enter.

**JAIL ASSAILED**

Overcrowded conditions at the jail have been assailed recently by several grand juries.

The February term grand jury called the jail "an archaic, dilapidated, grossly overcrowded relic of the early part of the century—totally inadequate to meet the needs resulting from increased population and the relentless escalation of the crime rate."

**REST IN PEACE  
 DR. MARTIN  
 LUTHER KING JR.  
 JANUARY 15, 1929 – APRIL 4, 1968**

*In April 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was murdered, and urban areas across the country erupted in riots. New York, Baltimore, D.C., Louisville, Chicago, Pittsburgh—in all, 125 cities burned in a collective venting of frustration and anger by those fucked-over all their lives by white, capitalist Amerikkka. Rebellions also occurred within prisons, including the St. Louis City Jail in downtown St. Louis.*

*The article below was originally published in the now-defunct St. Louis Globe-Democrat the day after MLK's murder. The second article is an excerpt from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, containing information about vandalism and arson that took place around the city that night.*

*Both articles use the horrifically outdated term "Negro" to refer to people of African origin. It's a relic from a more overtly racist time. We've reprinted the articles with this language intact so as to not "clean-up" the language of the racist people, time and place that produced these words. But despite our objection to this terminology, the words "African-American" can be said with just as much contempt and hatred as the word "Negro." Prettying-up the reality of racism only makes it harder to fight, as Black men continue to be jailed, beaten and murdered by the State (cops, courts, prisons, mental hospitals, etc.) at alarming rates.*

*Remembering the history of rebellion to the racist society we live in can give us strength to continue to fight or even just to survive in this world.*



**REST IN PEACE  
DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. continued**

That jury reiterated the need for immediate action leading to the provision of a new and adequate jail. The December term jury called for a study of a bond issue to pay for construction of a new jail.

**426 CAPACITY**

Built in 1913, the jail has a capacity of 426 inmates. In recent months, its population has exceeded 400 on several occasions. Grand jurors have noted that exercise and recreation programs for prisoners are non-existent.

The jail has been the scene of numerous disturbances. Last Nov. 27, an outbreak of rioting in the jail resulted in injuries to two prisoners and a policeman. That disorder was touched off when guards sent to remove two men from the "bullpen" on the third floor were rushed by other prisoners.

**GRIEVANCES LISTED**

A list of grievances submitted by rioters in November blamed the disturbance on tension created by allegedly insufficient food, overcrowding, "unfair" treatment by the courts and racial prejudice by jail personnel. In November 1966, about 40 prisoners protested about evening meals and set fire to two mattresses. In both instances, guards put out the fires.

**RIOT AT CITY JAIL: "THEY KILLED OUR LEADER"**  
St. Louis Post-Dispatch  
April 5th, 1968

There were other scattered disturbances last night. An attempt was made to set fire to a former fire station at 3934 Enright avenue that neighboring Negroes have unsuccessfully sought for a recreation center. Someone splashed gasoline on the east side of the building and set fire to it. Firemen put out the blaze.

A Molotov cocktail was thrown at the front window of a grocery store at 812 Academy avenue but a heavy screen deflected the missile and no damage was done. Windows were broken in five stores in the 1300 block of North Kingshighway.

Police reported that bricks were thrown through the windows of automobiles belonging to Ronald Odette, 8852 Cozzens avenue, Jennings, and Aroba newton, 25 University street, last night. The incidents occurred at the intersection of Jefferson and Cass avenues where the drivers had stopped for a traffic signal. Windows were reported broken at Al's Food Market, 1307 North Jefferson avenue, Harry's Market, 1979 Burn Avenue, and Spot Linoleum Co., 5510 Easton Avenue.

**HERE'S A COMIC**



Reaction News: All the news you thought you heard.

**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 THERE!

OAK ROOT PRESS  
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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.



# FOOD FOR THOUGHT

## FROM A PENNSYLVANIA PRISONER

*An excerpt from a letter*

I'm writing to comment on your "Response" article from the previous newsletter explaining your position in not supporting unashamed rapists. I applaud you for such stance. However, if I were you, I'd add snitches, violent offenders who prey upon the innocuous and unrepentant murderers who deliberately killed innocent people.

[Like the rapist,] the murderer who kills the innocent, unsuspecting victim also destroys the psyche, sense of security and sense of freedom of the victim's family members and the people of the community. Then we have snitches . . . I'm referring to the rotten "criminal" who assist law enforcement for the sake of keeping himself out of prison.

All such behavior is unacceptable. Therefore, I suggest that you add the snitch and the senseless murderer to your list.

## FROM A MISSOURI PRISONER

*An excerpt from a letter*

When I got your *February News and Views* and read the statement on rapists, I knew I finally had an outlet . . . It seems that anything that incites thought or awareness is frowned upon and subsequently denied us. They dictate what is "acceptable". Nothing thought-provoking. Nothing to open our eyes . . . We are the "human farm". We are "produce" in their eyes. They harvest us from society and place us in camps. Not all of us are blind. I see the truth. I live the truth everyday when I wake up on this plantation.

What they fail to realize is that my eyes are open. I see what and who they are. I refuse to be a slave to their system. They may house me, but they don't own me, and my mind has no fences or locks. In my mind, I am free. They can't take that from me unless I let them, which I won't.

Fight on. Rage against the machine. Always remember we are not all blind sheep following the shepherd.  
- Your fellow anti-conformist



## ACTIVITIES BY PRISONERS

### ON THE INSIDE

About 200 prisoners at Kinross Correctional Facility in Kincheloe, Michigan, left their cells and demonstrated in the yard over their food, two months after the DOC contracted out its food service.

*Detroit Free Press, February 18*

A prisoner ended his individual, 16-day hunger strike at Lanesboro Correctional Institution in Polkton, NC, after many of his demands were met, including cleaning supplies, a clean mattress, appropriate-sized clothing, paper, pens, and envelopes.

*Charlotte Observer, March 7*

Citing inspiration from the Feb. 24th protest blockade outside the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, Washington, that stopped the deportation of 120 people that day, 1200 inmates there launched a hunger strike protesting poor food, low pay, high commissary, and mistreatment.

*The Seattle Times, March 7*

Following the lead of hunger-striking immigrant inmates in Tacoma, Washington, 120 immigrant prisoners at Joe Corley

Detention Facility in Conroe, Texas also launched a hunger strike demanding an end to deportations, overcrowding, and poor treatment.

*Houston Chronicle, March 17*

Officials at Butte County Jail in Oroville, California, report that about 30 inmates organized a hunger strike to protest being placed on lockdown.

*-Chico Enterprise-Recorder, March 26*

After months of complaints over food, officials at Hinds County Jail in Raymond, Mississippi, reported violence broke out in one of the jail's pods leading inmates to expel guards and take over that pod for a number of hours.

*-WSEA-NBC Jackson, March 31*

Officials at Holman Correctional Facility in Atmore, Alabama, announced that prisoners there were on "work strike," refusing to go to work out of frustration with crumbling infrastructure, cold winter conditions, poor access to medical care, bad food, no gym time, and harassment of family members during visitations.

*The Mobile Press-Register, April 3*

### ON THE OUTSIDE

Demanding an end to all deportations, seven undocumented immigrants and supporters locked themselves together and

*Continued on page 8*

An Excerpt from *Back From Hell: Black Power and Treason to Whiteness Inside Prison Walls*  
by *Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin*

*A personal account by Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin of a cross-race alliance of prisoners against conditions at a federal penitentiary in Terre Haute, Indiana in the early 1970s.*

The federal penitentiary at Terre Haute, Indiana had the reputation of being the most racist and brutal prison in the federal prison system. The city of Terre Haute itself had been known in the 1920s as one of the strongest base areas for the Ku Klux Klan in the Midwest. As I was to discover later, many prison guards were Klan members or sympathizers. There were no black guards at the time I entered it, in the summer of 1970.

The most famous inmate to do time at the prison was the 1950s rock and roll singer, Chuck Berry, during the early 1960s, and reportedly he spoke disparagingly about the state of Indiana for years afterward and said he would never have a concert in the city of Terre Haute. I do not know if this is true.

Usually racism is the best tool of the prison officials to control volatile prison populations. The warden and his guards intentionally keep up racial hostilities through rumors and provocation, and give a free hand within the prison to groups like the KKK and the Aryan Brotherhood to maim or kill Black prisoners. They use the racist white prisoners to confine both themselves and others, in return for special privileges and the fleeting feeling that they are "helping" the "white race" maintain control. This is how the system imprisons whites and uses them in their own oppression. The officials can usually count on recruiting a steady supply of racist murderers and henchmen from the white prison population. But an important part of the plan is to beat down or silence anti-racist whites, in order to make sure all whites toe the fascist line. In fact, without this conformity the whole plan would not work.

For years many black inmates had been beaten or killed at Terre Haute by both white prison inmates and guards. I knew from the stories I had been told by black prisoners in Atlanta that this was true. In fact, the black prisoners at Terre Haute had lived in total fear of the whites. I said "had" because by the time I got there things had started to change.

We had to fight both the racist authorities and the white inmates on behalf of the black prison population, many of whom were intimidated into silence. We were bold and audacious, and carried on a virtual guerrilla war to strike back at the killers of black men, whether they were guards or inmates. The whites hated and feared us because we were ruthless in defending ourselves and punishing racists. There was no mercy. Our retaliation was always swift and bloody.

Our kind of revolutionary blacks had never been seen before at Terre Haute, and it changed the status quo when we fought back. Many of the prisoners were white radicals who were in prison for anti-war cases, and they in turn began to educate other whites. The anti-racist organizing by white radicals was important because it ensured that white prisoners would no longer be indoctrinated or intimidated by the Klan as they had been for the previous thirty-five years at that prison. This re-education

was something black revolutionaries could not effectively do alone, and prisoners began to check out books from the Black Culture library, to attend joint political study groups, and to try to understand in theoretical terms how racism was a way of enslaving us all — blacks and other non-whites as inferiors, whites as oppressors. They understood now how the Klan had been doing the bidding of the prison officials for years, just like the white workers in society do the bidding of the capitalists. Fascist politics became not only unpopular but unsafe.

Guards used to the old regime decided to suddenly "retire," and racist inmates begged to be transferred. The Warden and his staff were greatly alarmed, but powerless to take any action lest they precipitate a full-fledged riot, which would also get guards and staff killed in large numbers. The prison officials realized they were losing control, and began to panic. All prison officials know that if racism is surmounted, revolt is inevitable.

Then in September of 1971 the Attica prison revolt erupted in upstate New York, and riveted the attention of the entire world on the U.S. prison system. Revolutionary prisoners — black, Latino, and white — had taken guards hostage at Attica and were running the prison. This terrified prison officials all over the United States. It also pushed forward the prison struggle and made it a red-hot issue.

Even after the repression of Attica, sympathy rebellions broke out all over the country, including at Terre Haute, where for the first time black, white, and Hispanic prisoners rose up to fight the prison officials. Buildings were torched or bombed, people tried to escape, strikes and industrial sabotage went on, and desperate hand-to-hand combat between guards and prisoners in the high-security L-unit was taking place, along with other acts of resistance which seemed to break out daily.

Warden Tucker and his staff panicked, and rushed to start building a new wing of high-security cells in L-unit to hold the "malcontents" in his prison. He then tried to provoke a confrontation, a "race riot" among inmates, but this didn't work because we had chased away most of the racists, and had made alliances with progressive white and Latino prisoners. These prisoners, many of whom were schooled in revolutionary politics, wouldn't fall for the old tricks.

The Warden could not convince the white prisoners, who had now struggled and suffered next to us, to accept the old racist "hate bait." They knew they were prisoners, and would not accept white skin privileges or resurrect the Klan to help the Warden run the prison. These white prisoners were standing up against their masters, and they were a different people entirely. They no longer saw anything in common with the Warden, not even "whiteness." The black prison population had overcome its fear and insecurity to become the vanguard and the backbone of a serious threat to the organized racial violence and repression which had ruled unchallenged for years...

*Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin is a Black anarchist and a former member of the Black Panther Party. He has been out of prison for many years and is still holdin' it down as an active anti-racist organizer in Memphis, TN at the age of 67.*

*The full version of this essay entitled Race Treason Behind Prison Walls is available by request from Oak Root Press.*

# AN EXERCISE!



This exercise helps to invigorate your mind as you stretch your arms, legs and back all at once. It is one of the best ones you can do when you're fatigued because it helps bring back lost energy. It also encourages blood flow throughout the body, helping your body flush toxins, keep your immune system in tip-top shape, and regulate blood pressure.



## ACTIVITIES continued

blocked the entrance of the Etowah County Detention Center in Gadsden, Alabama.  
*The Gadsden Times, March 24*

In support of hunger-striking prisoners, dozens demonstrated at the entrance to the GEO Group CEO's gated-community neighborhood in Boca Raton, Florida. The GEO Group runs for-profit prisons throughout the country including the immigrant detention facilities in Washington and Texas where prisoners were striking.  
*WPEC-CBS 12, March 24*

One hundred relatives, friends, and supporters of those incarcerated at the Eloy, Arizona, Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention center walked over 60 miles from Phoenix to protest outside the facility demanding an end to all deportations.  
*-The Washington Post, April 5*

Demonstrators calling for the release of all immigrants in detention centers blocked an intersection outside the Broadview Detention Center in Broadview, Illinois.  
*-Chicago Tribune, April 8*

Outside the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Detention Facility in Queens, New York, demonstrators held a noise demonstration for those locked inside, declaring their solidarity with the hunger strikers in Washington and Texas and standing behind a banner reading, "Stop the deportations, or the people will."  
*-New York Times, April 6*

