

TO the DOOR

WORDS & IMAGES
from the inside

art - poetry - essays by inmates

in this issue:

Spring 2006

A Tour of Illinois D.O.C.

Featuring eight of
Illinois' fourty-four prisons:

Dixon
Marion
Pontiac
Danville
Menard
Joliet
Lawrence
Tamms



Words



Art Work



Images

a publication of UC Books2prisoners

Breaking Down the Walls:

**The First Annual Champaign-Urbana Prison Arts
Festival**

April 20-22, 2006

Co-sponsored by the University of Illinois Center on
Democracy in a Multiracial Society, OPENSOURCE art, and the
Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities

Globalizing Abu Ghraib

Thursday, April 20, 4:00-5:30

Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities
805 West Pennsylvania, Urbana

A roundtable discussion on the relationships among prisons,
torture, globalization, and empire, featuring:

- Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi (History) on the future of democracy in the Muslim World.
- Zsuzsa Gille (Sociology) on globalization and violence.
- Ellen Moodie (Anthropology) on political violence in Latin America.
- Stephen Hartnett (Speech Comm/CDMS) on the responsibility for Abu Ghraib.
- Michael Rothberg (English/Unit for Criticism) on the histories of empire and torture.

Prison Arts Festival Opening and Party

Friday, 21 April, 8:00-late

OPENSOURCE
12 E. Washington, Champaign www

OPENSOURCE will host a traveling collection of prisoner art collected by the Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP) of Ann Arbor, Michigan. Art made by Illinois prisoners, and collected by Sandra Ahten of the Champaign-Urbana Books to Prisoners Program, will also be displayed. Opening comments by Tim Green from OPENSOURCE and Buzz Alexander from PCAP will be followed by wine, cheese, and, later, dancing to the rockin' tracks spun by UC Hip-Hop. Come and see the art, meet fellow activists, and dance the night away!

What We Leave Behind

Saturday, 22 April, Noon-to-2:00

Boardman's Art Theatre
126 West Church, downtown Champaign

A remarkable documentary produced by the Beyondmedia collective from Chicago, *What We Leave Behind* was written, filmed, and edited by formerly incarcerated women to portray how the prison-industrial complex destroys families. After the screening, join in a discussion with the filmmakers!

How to Fight The Prison Industrial Complex

Saturday, 22 April, 2:30-4:00

OPENSOURCE
12 E. Washington, Champaign

A roundtable discussion on strategies for advocating for social justice, featuring:

- William Patterson, U. of I. African American Studies, hosting.
- Judith Tannenbaum (Bay Area activist) on teaching political poetry in prisons.
- Edward Hinck (Central Michigan State U.) on teaching debate skills in prisons.
- Sandra Ahten (Books to Prisoners) on winning grassroots strategies.
- Cherrie Green (Critical Resistance) on mobilizing youth for justice.
- Andrea Brandon (Students for Sensible Drug Policy) on sane drug policies.
- John Howard Association representative on monitoring prisons.

Slam-Jam/Romp-Stomp II

Saturday, 22 April, 7:30-9:00

OPENSOURCE
12 E. Washington, Champaign

As our capstone event, join us for a raucous evening of prison-based poetry. Poems by Illinois prisoners will be read by members of Champaign-Urbana's Citizens for Peace and Justice, poems by Michigan prisoners will be read by Janie Paul; poems by California prisoners will be read by Judith Tannenbaum; and poems in honor of her students on Rikers Island will be read by Brooklyn's Tori Samartino. Come prepared to be enlightened and empowered by the voices the prison-industrial-complex wants silenced.

Dixon Correctional Center

Opened: July 1983

Capacity: 1,430

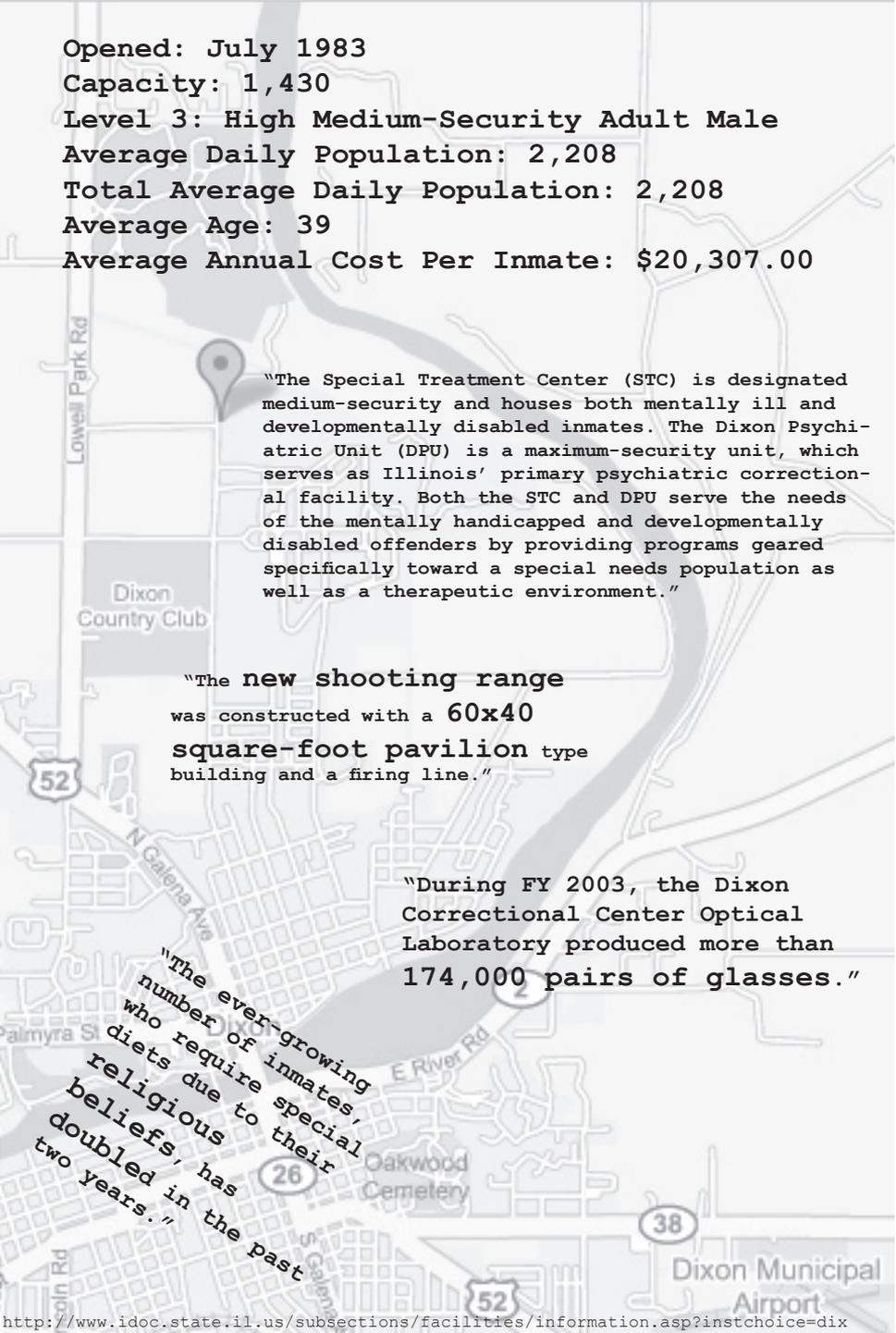
Level 3: High Medium-Security Adult Male

Average Daily Population: 2,208

Total Average Daily Population: 2,208

Average Age: 39

Average Annual Cost Per Inmate: \$20,307.00



"The Special Treatment Center (STC) is designated medium-security and houses both mentally ill and developmentally disabled inmates. The Dixon Psychiatric Unit (DPU) is a maximum-security unit, which serves as Illinois' primary psychiatric correctional facility. Both the STC and DPU serve the needs of the mentally handicapped and developmentally disabled offenders by providing programs geared specifically toward a special needs population as well as a therapeutic environment."

"The new shooting range was constructed with a 60x40 square-foot pavilion type building and a firing line."

"During FY 2003, the Dixon Correctional Center Optical Laboratory produced more than 174,000 pairs of glasses."

"The ever-growing number of inmates, who require special diets due to their religious beliefs, has doubled in the past two years."



Patrice Daniels

B70662

2600 North Brinton Ave.

Dixon IL 61021

I hated being poor

Mustard & mayonnaise
sandwiches,
drinking sugar water.
Government cheese,
it'll bring u to your knees.
Slip & slides,
XJ900's.
No Reebok,
no Fila.
Teased endlessly,
mercilessly taunted.
For a while,
I was seriously haunted.
Wranglers,
no Levi,
no Bugle Boy.
The lights & gas,
they never last.
Things are good,
on the 1st.
A few wks. later,
it always gets worse.
Hand-me-downs,
that's nothin',
i've worn my mothers' jeans.
To survive & get by,
poor folks do some crazy
things.

Legal Advice

Looking out through,
the bars,
from the prison law library.
Prospects for a future,
look futile,
& it's scary.
Drive you 2 drinkin',
all that damn thinkin'.
Gin & juice,
that'll let me loose.
The strain,
it's so insane.
My heart aches,
a well done juicy steak,
a potato 2 bake.
Sour cream & cheddar,
it never gets any better.
10 pg. letter,
I should just forget her.
Looking out through,
these prison bars,
walls full of scars.
Tear stained tiers,
drowning in fears,
4 so many yrs.

Caught Up (The System)

I want to preface my commentary by saying, what I write is solely based on my own life experiences. The conclusions I've drawn are not scientific. Never the less, they are accurate & relevant to the overall theme of this piece. The reality is, most of the guys I spent time w/ in juvenile facilities & mental health facilities are now in the adult system with me. There's a reason for that. I believe I know some of the answers to that question. I hope to share them w/ you in this piece.

I was about 10 yrs. old the first 1st time I was checked into a mental health hospital. The facility was in Maywood IL & it was called Madden Mental Health. I'd been labeled "emotionally disturbed" by a child psychologist. Due to the fact that I was a frequent bed-wetter, fire-starter & overall disruption at home & at school, he felt it was a good idea to have me admitted for a 90 day evaluation. My mother & grandmother agreed. The Chicago Public School system recommended he be sought out for consultation & the rest was history. My introduction to institutional life began.

By the age of 10, I'd already been a child sex abuse survivor, witness to numerous episodes of domestic & gang violence, drug & alcohol abuse, & I'd had my share of "whippings" (for this or that infraction - I was not a saint). Some "whippings" were more sever than others. It really depended on how badly I'd misbehaved & what kind of mood my guardian was in. Institutional life is void of "whippings"; something I took note of immediately. A welcome relief. I think it's safe to say I was not a stranger to the tougher aspects of life. Poverty was also a part of my reality. So w/ that kind of backdrop, you may be able to understand a little better why I actually enjoyed being in Madden.

That's right, I said I enjoyed being in the hospital. It was so much nicer than home. It was safe. Clothing, housing, food & medical care were a given. There were nice toys to play w/ & all kinds of activities & outings. The adult supervisors never yelled at us & seemed genuinely concerned w/ my welfare & well-being. Unlike the constant sense of dread & fear I lived w/ at home. Not only did I enjoy the perks, but it also seemed like my family treated me better when I came home for my weekend visits. Was it because they missed me? Was it because they only had to deal w/ me 2 days a week? Answers I don't have.

It's worth noting I also seemed to behave differently on those weekend visits. I was better behaved. In retrospect, I have concluded that my good behavior may be attributed to the fact that I was relieved. I knew I didn't have to stay there at home.

I knew I was going back to Madden Sunday evening & I wouldn't have to deal w/ all the chaos at home. I hated being at home back then. I believe this 1st encounter set the stage for what would become a childhood / adolescence full of institutions. My "career" encompasses almost 2 decades. I am only 30 now. Over ½ of my life has been spent in the system. It's a very odd thing. It's a trap in many ways.

Once you get in it, you never seem to break free. I believe at a certain point I stopped caring about being "out". Being "in" was such a familiar & comfortable situation it became normal. I feel it's appropriate to note, that although my enumeration of the circumstances surrounding my introduction into the system, on an institutional level, may come off negative in tone, I do not bemoan the fact that I have had a turbulent & difficult upbringing. Quite the contrary. Instead I view it as a badge of perseverance. I think it speaks volumes to my internal fortitude & capacity to endure.

As I was saying, being "in" was something I'd grown accustomed to. The way these institutions are structured lends its self to comfortability. It also breeds a lack of responsibility. They encourage dependence. In fact, it makes stagnation very easy to embrace. I want to make clear, I am only speaking to the structural aspect of institutional life. The way it is SET UP is where the damage (for lack of a better word) is occurring. The facility its self is designed to help. On a basic & primary level it does that. I am speaking to the less evident & visible effects. A counteractive development is occurring simultaneously. That's what I want to highlight. And although this may appear to be complicated & somewhat sophisticated, a 10 yr. old gets it. Not necessarily as clearly deciphered as I have, but pretty close to it.

Just as a matter of practicality & basic development, let's look at this. If you had someone who was willing to give you free food, clothing, medical care, housing & a safe environment irrespective of how you behaved, would you value that as much as if you had to work hard & earn those very same things? It's akin to the generally accepted belief that something hard earned is shone more regard & reverence. You value it more than a handout. I believe that even in an institutional setting this process can be interwoven with the structure.

Institutions need to figure out ways to integrate responsibility, reward & earning conceptually into their dynamic. If not, the result will continue to be a recycling of individuals who never really "grow" or "get better" - people who choose the comfortability, reliability & familiarity of institutional living instead of the reality of the world & all that world has to offer.

The truth of the matter is, once you get past being separated from family & friends institutional life is relatively easy to deal w/. That goes for adults & juveniles alike. Furthermore, in many cases being in an institution is far better than being at home.

Tragic & sad, but never the less, it is true. A system, that on its face, would appear to be committed to the betterment of society, has instead become a warehouse of sorts & a comforter condoning stagnation; mostly be default, but just as real & damaging. The current structure of "the system" encourages underdevelopment & a lack of personal responsibility / getting better. I can not stress that enough. I also want to make it clear that this only applies to those w/ a favorable prognosis; those that may have problems that are treatable. In some instances my rationale does not apply. I am speaking to those that do.

Finally, I want to say this. I don't discount or dismiss the many benefits incurred by me being in some of the institutions I've been in. I've experienced things I never would have otherwise experienced. The theatre, professional sporting events, hunting / fishing & so forth. Not to mention a quality education & a free year of college. I am a more well-rounded person as a result. W/ that said, being more well-rounded is no substitute for substantive & meaningful growth / development / getting better. So I am still back at square 1, which is, structurally something that needs to change w/ in the system. Something needs to be developed that will encourage & advocate "getting better" for real or it will continue to be a breeding ground for career patience / residents / inmates.

Patrice Daniels
B70662
2600 North Brinton Ave.
Dixon IL 61021

Marion Correctional Center

U.S. Penitentiary



<http://www.bop.gov/locations/institutions/mar/index.jsp>

"The United States Penitentiary (USP) in Marion, Illinois, is a high security facility housing male inmates. The facility also has an adjacent satellite prison camp that houses minimum security male offenders.

USP Marion is located approximately 9 miles south of the city of Marion, 300 miles from Chicago, and 120 miles from St. Louis, Missouri."

The term "**control unit**" was first coined at United States Penitentiary (USP) at Marion, Illinois in 1972 and has come to designate a prison or part of a prison that operates under a "super-maximum security" regime. Control unit prisons may differ from each other in some details but all share certain defining features:

1. Prisoners in a control unit are kept in **solitary confinement** in tiny cells (six by eight feet is usual) for between twenty-two and twenty-three hours a day. There is no congregate dining, no congregate exercise, no work opportunities and no congregate religious services.

2. These conditions exist permanently (temporary lockdowns occur at almost every prison) and as official policy.

3. The conditions are officially justified not as punishment for prisoners but as an *administrative* measure. Prisoners are placed in control units in *administrative* moves and since there are no rules governing such moves (in contrast to *punitive* moves), prisoners are denied any due process and prison officials can incarcerate any prisoner in a control unit for as long as they choose, **without having to give any reason.**

http://www-unix.oit.umass.edu/~kastor/ceml_articles/cu_in_us.html

Tough on Crime

Excuse me!

But tough on crime
Started back with "the rack",
N' the guillotine
Was a pretty tough act,
So was hanging rustlers
Where you found them at.

Territorial prisons

Chain gangs
The death penalty
With 50,000 volts of current,
Those were all tough
But apparently no deterrent.

N' I'm afraid

"tough on crime"
Is fine
As a political line
But it didn't work
Any other time...

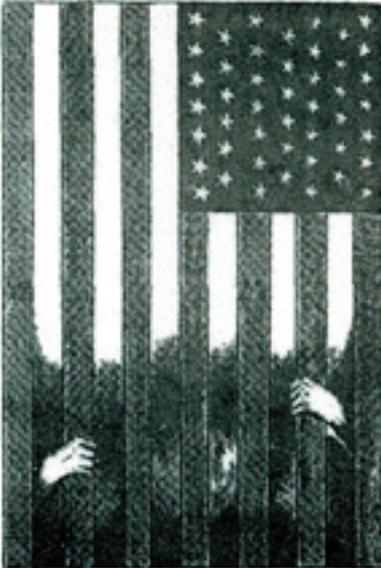
My Real Sentence

Being ugly, is its own prison
Looking over a nose too long
Past a face ravaged by acne
At beauty and soft skin I will
Never touch.

I remember every
Face I longed to kiss, every
Romance that never happened,
Always settling for less and
Knowing there is no parole

from
Ugliness...

Philip Kellotat
59220
PO Box 1000
Marion IL 62959



OPPRESSION

Todd (Hyung-Rae) Tarselli
BY-8025
175 Progress Drive
Waynesburg, PA 15370-8089

Pontiac Correctional Center



Pontiac Correctional Center is the only Illinois facility with a Condemned Unit. As such, the center was an integral part of former Governor Ryan's commutation process for Condemned Unit offenders.

Two prisons used
to hold Illinois'

death

row inmates
but now only two
cells are need-
ed, since former
Gov. George

Ryan **com-**
muted the sen-
tences of **167**
condemned
prisoners
before leaving
office ... January
[2003].



the North Condemned Unit at Pontiac Correctional Institution

Since then, the condemned unit at **Pontiac reopened** in February when the first of two men was sentenced to die and a second was sent there in early August 2003.

Pontiac Correctional Center holds the distinction of being the **eighth oldest correctional facility in the U.S.** having opened in June 1871 as the Boy's Reformatory. It was re-named the Illinois State Penitentiary - Pontiac Branch in 1933 and in 1973 it received the name it bears today.

Perspective

My sun it shines on concrete, asphalt, steel and bars,
Your sun it shines on grass, flowers, houses and cars.
Is it the same sun I see rise every day?
Or is your sun quite different in its own way?
Your stars they shine on parks, forests, and the churches spire,
My stars they shine on walls, fences, and barbed wire.
Your stars that shine in your sky at night,
Are they any different than stars I see in my sight?
When you look up and see that your sky is blue,
Could it be that it's the same blue that I'm seeing too?
Or is it quite different the way that we see
With you being you and me being me.

Craig Bradley
A70983
Box 99
Pontiac IL 61764

Hear My Prayer...

Brutal, cruel and unusual Torment,... Devastating;
The Pain's for Real, not Immitating!
Meditating, I close my eyes,
Think about my demise,
Wishing all my Realities were lies!!!
I'm Begging for Peace, Fighting Demons, Screaming,
I can't Compete,
Impede this place of Deceit,
Delete this concrete deep, steep, sleep I can't defeat,
Retreat this Obsolete Freak Beneath!!!
How can I be Forsaken! Mistaken? undertaken!
It's Blatan! It's Satan evil Sensation! Temptation!!
Contemplation to turn me into a Mental Patient!!!
But Lord No! I Can't Go!!
See, I got a Daughter, a Mother, a Brother,
And I Beg of you Father,
I can't be Slaughtered!!!
Give me Water,
Let me drown this Beast,
Extinguish the Heat,
He's Released,
That's Kept me deep in the dirt Beneath,
Let Em Rot, Let Em Sleep,
I'm tired of Being Weak, Beat and incomplete,
Forgive my tongue lord,
But F__K this creep!!!!
It's my Reality,
And with All Sincerity,
I Ask you,
Hear my Prayer!

Eddie Alvarado
K58230
Danville Correctional Center
3820 E Main
Danville, IL 61834

I entrust in you, Because you truly do
 Relate,
 I confide in you, Because you are the
 Soul of this Inmate...
 You are the Walls of the charade,
 The imprisoned Feelings within my
 Barricade...
 The Barb-Wire that Surrounds my Fence,
 Towers my dreams, Secrets, Fears, tears
 and defence...

You are the Bars that Keep me confined,
 The existing Pain and Reality within my
 Rhymes...
 Together we combine,
 Even when we're lost in time,
 Together we Wreck one Another's Mind,
 When it True verity, we're both one of a
 kind...

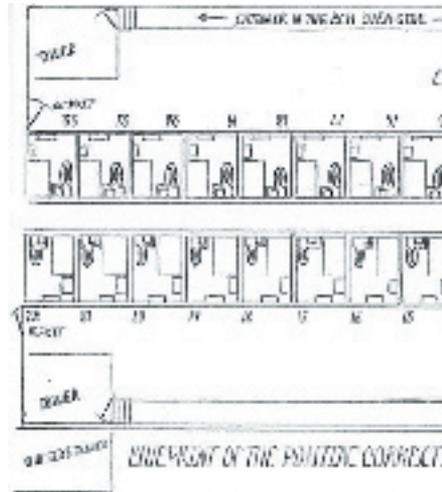
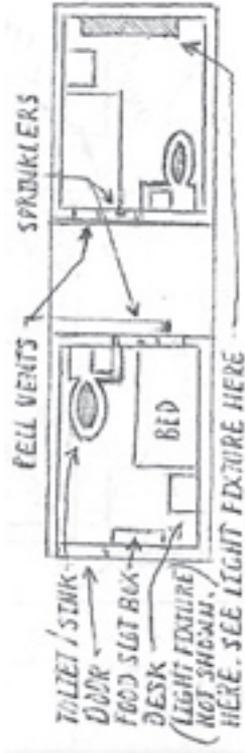
Prestiged... But Really So Underachieved;
 Concealed... My True Identity, dying to Be
 Revealed.

Deep as a Bottomless Pitt,
 Dark, But dying & desiring to be lit...
 Never wanting to Fail,
 Becoming the Meaning of that word, to no
 avail...

I Feel you truly understand the Real
 definition
 of my Scares,
 And it's Becoming a Failure, if I Dare...
 You listen... And I Bare it All,
 Diary... I'm determined to make it,
 Even if I Fall...

Eddie Alvarado
 K58230
 Danville Correctional Center
 3820 E Main
 Danville, IL 61834

Illustrations by:
 Anthony Wilkerson
 N60045
 Box 99
 Pontiac IL 61764



All of Me

If I could live without my heart, then, this is surely what I'd do. I would put it in an envelope, and mail it home to you. I would write a not to let you know to do whatever you please, because even if my body died my soul would be at ease.

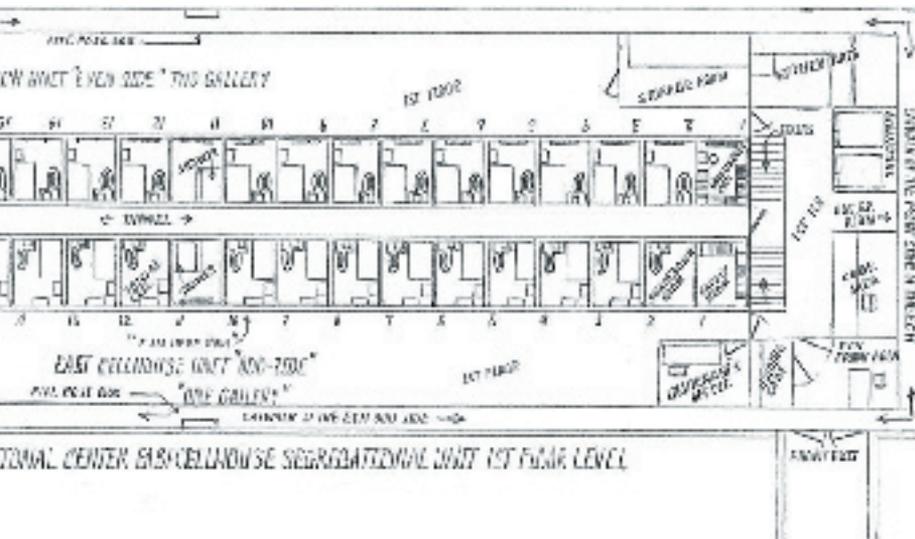
If it didn't matter as much my eyes would get sent too, cause even when my eyes are closed I still get visions of you.

If you take my lips, then, that's okay, 'cause it's something I really won't miss cause everytime you look around you'll see them posed in permanent bliss.

If you take my hand it's not a big deal, 'cause I don't need fingers to know how I feel.

You could take my nose; my body will be locked to your scent. You can take out my tongue; I won't be ashamed, 'cause all of these words I said won't ever change.

Quantrell Blackman
K50232
Pontiac Correctional Center
PO Box 99
Pontiac, IL



Man Made Hell

My home is full of heart ache
A place of steel and stone
Just one cell, my place in hell
And here I sit alone.
At time I rage and pace my cage
And terror is my friend.
This is a place where no man wants
To say that he has been.
The sounds of screams and metal swings,
Of keys in metal locks,
The scrape of feet upon concrete,
As guards patrol their blocks.
Convicts, knives, take human lives
No place holds more danger
And in the passing of these days
Each man remains a stranger...

Charles Blackwell
B84327
Pontiac Correctional Center
PO Box 99
Pontiac, IL 61764

Todd (Hyung-Rae) Tarselli
BY-8025
175 Progress Drive
Waynesburg, PA 15370-8089





Menard Correctional Center

13th. Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

* "The Industries Department of Menard Correctional Center had a net **profit** of **\$1,072,934** on sales of more than \$4.1 **million** [in 2003]. This is **far beyond** the goals that were set."

Opened: March 1878

Capacity:

1,938

Total Average Daily Population:

3,315



* <http://www.idoc.state.il.us/subsections/facilities/information.asp?instchoice=men>

Perfume

Dedicated to Michelle R.

This morning

I awoke to the scent of your perfume,
It was lingering from the corner of my room.
I sat up in my bed,
Noticing that my senses had me misled,
Searching for something, anything in my mind,
Desperate for memories to find,
Seeking what's in my soul,
Hopelessly falling into a deep hole.

This afternoon,

While in the yard, I smelled your perfume,
It was like wild roses in full bloom,
I had to sit down, and collect my every thought,
For years this pain I have fought,
It was like having you by my side all over again,
Only to realize all things must come to an end.
It seems I live day to day now,
Your departure has forced me to take a bow.

Tonight,

I feel asleep to the scent of your perfume,
Into a deep sleep, it swept me like a broom,
I try to differentiate reality from delusion,
I attempt to distinguish the truth from illusion,
My mind I'm recklessly trying to penetrate,
The suffering I try to sedate,
It seems like what we had was a hallucination,
Makes me question, was it real or imagination,
Day to day our love I try to find,
Eight years later and you're still heavy on my mind.

Today,

I will awaken to your perfume,
It will remind me of days when love was in full bloom.

John Searles

R14717

PO Box 711

Menard, IL 62259

Lost and Found

Lost in the shadows, waiting for the light to shine on me.
On bended knee, looking up, making a plea.
Lost in the shadows, waiting for the light to shine on me.
On bended knee, looking up, screaming why me?
Lost in the shadows, waiting for the light to shine on me.
On bended knee, looking up being judged as heartless.
Lost in the shadows, waiting for the light to shine on me.
On bended knee, looking up to see someone there to find me.
Found in the shadows, wait for me and him to get started.
Standing on two feet, looking up to see someone reminds me
that even in the darkest places, a light still shines.

Mark Parsons
R14204
PO Box 711
Menard, IL 62259

Joliet Correctional Center

Illinois Youth Center



[in 2003] "The center
reduced its overtime
by \$235,000"

Opened: April 1959
Capacity: 344
Maximum-Security Juvenile Male
Average Daily Population: 292
Average Age: 18
Average Annual Cost Per Inmate:
\$56,351.00

"Youth who obtain their GED are given specific job assignments. Youth are enrolled in school immediately upon arrival to the facility."



"During FY 2003, 25 youth graduated with GED certificates."

<http://www.idoc.state.il.us/subsections/facilities/information.asp?instchoice=joe>

Had I learned a newer language

Had I learned a newer language—
Scarcely known the English one.
Had not understood my rhythm,
For God's wisdom is the sun.

Will not know the mass of oceans,
Nor seethe the mountain range,
My eyes whistle ungraceful ballets
For all I see is prison chains.

Can not comprehend my demise—
An enterprise I shall not know?
Although riches of quietus,
My life has never shown

There is purpose for my being
That my soul can't bear to shame
I curse the man that wishes death
As I wish myself the same.

I asked God, why do you hate me?
She responded, hate you why—
You should know you are my son
I dwell in child,
not the sky

Lord, should mother love me dearly...
Father left us long ago
Nostalgia paints a picture
Of his presents wrapped in snow.

Son, all learned through misadventure,
And through all your pains and grief
You should discover nothing new
Except what you used to be.

Raishme Worlds
K72713
Joliet Correctional Center
P.O. Box 112
Joliet, IL 60434

soccer mom

insects curdle my hysteria
except the bumble bee.
fuzzy, black, and yellow skin
an outfit of my intrigue.
the shiny shells of 6 leg'd things
may speed the heart and yield my breath--
spiraling webs of arachnids
drapping 'neath an attic attic step.
but the bumble-bee in lethargic flight,
unlike the slip and slime of worms or worse,
dazzles my intelligence
of kamikaze war-jets and women that curse.

Raisheme Worlds

WOMYN ARE THE FASTEST
GROWING PRISON
POPULATION
IN -

amerikkka \$



P.S.C.
WAR

ON THE POOR &
PEOPLE OF

COLOR

Kevin (Rashid) Johnson
#185492
Red Onion State Prison
P.O. Box 1900
Pound, VA 24279

Lawrence Correctional Center

Opened: November 2001

Capacity: 2,257

Level 2: Secure Medium-Security Adult Male

Average Daily Population: 915

Total Average Daily Population: 915

Average Age: 33

Average Annual Cost Per Inmate: \$28,326.00

Since its inception, Lawrence Correctional Center has developed into a 56-acre compound that is situated on 160 acres of land. The complex incorporates approximately 364,000 square feet of space within 16 buildings. Eight of these buildings function as housing units for the inmate population, which along with the Segregation Unit and infirmary will extend the maximum inmate capacity to 2,426.

Serenity

Weightless formation over and through the clouds,
the unknown spirit sets forth on a voyage of
discovery.

The birds' eyes reflecting the sun's rays
over the landscapes, and through the mist.

Mountain tops, emerald green bodies of wisdom
standing through the test of time.

Gentle waves crashing, foaming, as the sealine meets the
sand,

patiently moving in unison with movements of the sky
A journey, a voyage, a traveler's delight- senses blazing
afresh with new life.

Find your way, feel the balance of the wave
realities imagination can deceptively lose its sight

There is no end, no goal
just a brand new experience with every blink of the
eye.

Bartosz Leszczynski

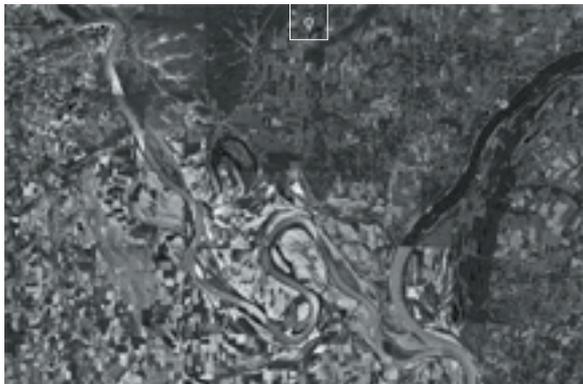
K70900

Lawrence Correctional Center

RR 2 PO Box 31

Sumner, IL 62466

Tamms Correctional Center



Tamms Correctional Center consists of a 200-bed Minimum-Security Unit (MSU) and a 500-bed closed maximum-security facility (CMAX).

"all inmate movement requires handling of the inmate in full restraints with a minimum escort ratio of 2:1 at all times and 3:1 for high security escorts"

Due to the CMAX conditions of confinement, no inmate work details are allowed in any of the living units.

The billboard at the east entrance to the remote rural village of Tamms, Illinois, reads "Tamms: The First Super Max," and below, in lowercase letters, "a good place to live." Inmates at Tamms, who live in a kind of state-sanctioned suspended animation, would tend to disagree. Confined to their cells, alone, twenty-three hours a day, inmates eat, sleep, defecate, urinate, read and write (if they are able), watch TV or listen to the radio (if they are allowed) in the same 8-by-12 cell, often for years on end. The monotony, sensory deprivation and mandated idleness of supermax confinement is especially torturous for inmates who have--or who develop during incarceration, as many do--a serious mental illness. It is this fact that forms the crux of the lawsuit filed against the prison in 1999 by Jean Maclean Snyder, a lawyer at the MacArthur Justice Center at the University of Chicago Law School. Snyder charges that the treatment of mentally ill prisoners at Tamms amounts to cruel and unusual punishment, a violation of their Eighth Amendment rights.

The lawsuit represents four plaintiffs, three of whom have attempted suicide. The MacArthur suit, like other challenges to supermaxes, was filed on behalf of the mentally ill among the Tamms population, but these suits are, in Snyder's words, "a surrogate for generalized legal challenges to supermaxes," which rarely prevail in court.

In what has been interpreted as a direct reaction to the MacArthur Center's lawsuit, Tamms opened a special mental health wing, called "J-Pod," in February 2000. This high-surveillance unit receives inmates who are broken enough, according to Illinois Department of Corrections standards, to be relieved of continual isolation--in essence, Tamms created a special unit to combat the effects of its policies, rather than consider reforming the regime. Here inmates are allowed daily contact with mental health staff and some interaction with other inmates. Even in J-Pod inmates must "earn" their way out of Tamms by correcting their behavior. But as Snyder points out, many mentally ill inmates can't "behave," by definition. And for those stuck in solitary confinement, she adds, "there is nothing to be good at, there is no behavior allowed." (Since Tamms opened in 1998, only fourteen men have "graduated" from the supermax and been sent back to lesser-security prisons.)

Why I'm Not a Thug!!

We start at an early age as rebellious young people, who live by ideas that are of interest only to us and our peers. This interest comes from watching elder brothers and sisters in the 'hood who we respect for their cunning ways and the feeling that they were down for the 'hood and the people in the community. In everyday parlance these are the proverbial "thugs," the bad boy and/or girl image that our elders conveyed to us, the younger "shorty's," and which we in turn marveled and glorified at. Many of those "thugs" were and are not criminal by nature; the majority of us have been forced into a criminal environment by economic, social and political ideas and the illusion of being afforded an easy way to do well. I make no excuse for what I do or did. I don't advocate the easy way of surviving an environment created to bring us down as a people.

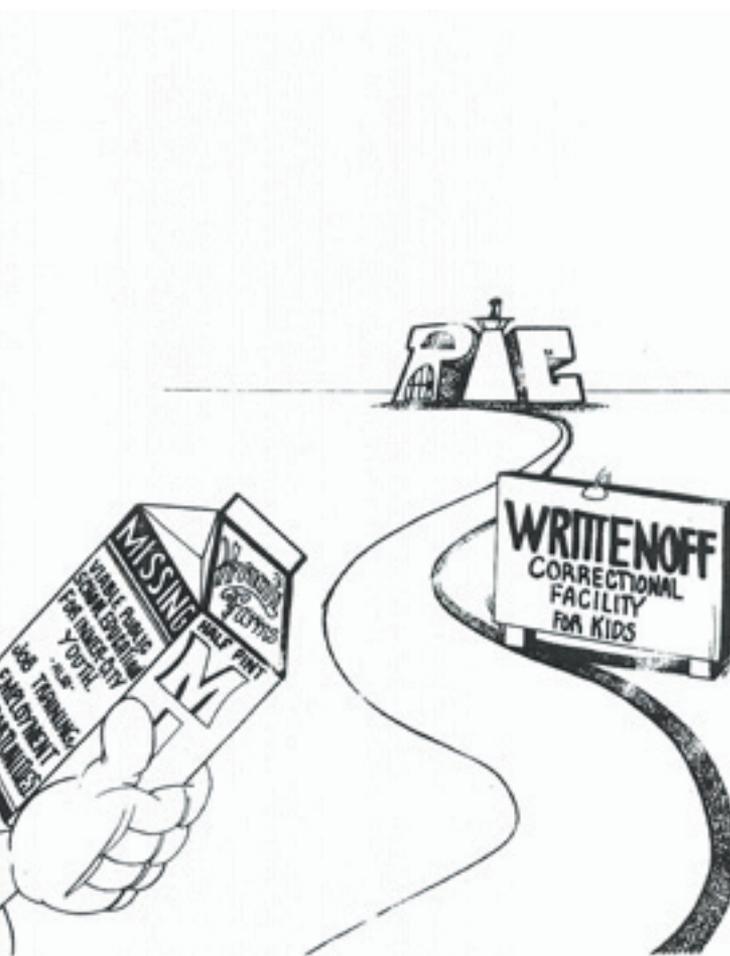
I don't look to portray an illusion that the proverbial thug life is the means to crush the social and political structure of a capitalist society. You cannot comprehend the thug life until you grasp the political, economic, and social interactions of a thug. What I do want to convey is that thug life has no political, economic, or social power to lead the people in the areas of political, economic, or social things. What we must do is abolish the façade of thug life and the current norm of raising a generation of thugs with no sense of culture, political and economical expectations or social involvement outside of thuggism. We must educate ourselves in order to raise our consciousness and those in our surrounding environment, who have no consciousness of their culture or political and economic awareness which is far above that of the thug life. This destructive illusion of thug life being glorified by rappers and in rap videos, this illusory thug life, is an intense process used to destroy the character of our individual selves. This process has come about through psychological indoctrination created years ago, for the purpose of capitalist gain from young and old people who, in reality, are the victims of thuggism ideals; cars, clothing, money, rappers, etc. While failing to improve the social, economic and political problems of the community. This way of life is failing to capture political power and create a social structure for the transformation of a thug life to a people of power.

As the thug life ideals progress, the power structure of the ruling class or the rich goes un-challenged and stands without a threat. Together as a people, we must correct his analysis of the thug life, and expose it for what it is; it is a path to death and imprisonment and the thievery of an opportunity to create a social class of a leading people. As the thug image grows, the monetary gain of those in power also grown, through the increase of the prison industrial complex. This pervasive miseducation of our people through the thug life image must be replaces with pride in who we are as a people, with understand and reasoning, that we are still fighting for equality, liberty, justice, and the people of the 'hood!!

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Western Correctional Center



Picture Courtesy of Paul Kendall , Local 3567

Service workers protesting the **privitization** of their jobs at Clayton Work Camp, of which Western Correctional Center is the parent orgainazition [January 2002].

Opened: April 1989

Capacity: 1,102

Average Daily Population: 1,921

Western Illinois Correctional Center is the parent institution Clayton Work Camp which has an Average Daily Population of 145

Total Average Daily Population: 2,066

Average Age: 33

Average Annual Cost Per Inmate:

\$15,210.00

Western had 120 students complete the Adult Basic Education course during FY 2003. There were 80 inmates who took the GED test with 72 passing, a 90 percent success rate. There were 60 inmates who received certificates in custodial maintenance. There were 937 life skills referrals forwarded to life skills centers. With a 7,340 total from all adult institutions, Western had 12.77 percent of the total.

Took for Granted

There's something about your
Kiss that I really miss,
The love I see in those
Eyes send chills up my spine.
The butterflies in my
Stomach flutter every time
I think or feel you touch.
Just imagining these
Things put me at a loss for words...
Sometimes I just close
My eyes and remember
All the times we shared,
The innocent moments
And the pillow talk,
The little things I took
For granted and
I realize that's
What I long for most...

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EDITORS NOTE

The writing in this Zine was solicited through correspondence with inmates in the Illinois correctional system. This correspondence was undertaken as a part of the Urbana-Champaign Books to Prisoners program.

UC Books to Prisoners, a project of the Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center, accepts book request letters from Illinois inmates, finds books that meet their needs, and sends them out with a personalized letter. We do this as a creative way to address the poor selection of books available in many prisons, to let prisoners know they are not forgotten, to remind us that prisoners are part of our community, to encourage literacy, to share our enthusiasm for literature, and to educate ourselves and the public about life in prison

Currently UC Books to Prisoners is working with volunteers from our community, public libraries and officials from the Champaign County Sheriff's Office to staff a lending library in the local jail. In addition to providing thousands of books (donated by our community) to the library, our volunteers staff the library each week and interact directly with the inmates.

For more information, or to volunteer with Books to Prisoners writing letters or staffing the library at the county jail, please visit our website at www.books2prisoners.org or email us at bookstoprisoners@lists.chambana.net

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