



INSIDE MISSOURI STATE PENITENTIARY: Observations of Number 14922

by JESSE LANG ¹

Allow me to convey to you the picture of prison life in the Missouri State Penitentiary (MSP). My analysis may be somewhat biased and unprofessional, because I'm not a psychologist, but a prisoner, lacking in formal education. (My IQ test showed that I have the equivalent of a fifth-grade education.) Forgive me when I'm wrong; my interpretations come only from close observation and personal experience.

THE UNCLE TOMS

I will begin with my observations of the "Uncle Toms." First we must ask: What makes them tick? Why are there Toms and where do they come from? Have there always been Toms and do they come from ordinary people?

I believe that the Tom is a person who has been psychologically defeated by his condition and by his surroundings in the penitentiary. There are Toms here who were at one time some of the most feared and courageous inmates in this place; not only feared and courageous, but also intelligent. Toms come in all shapes, fashions, and personalities. There are some who hide behind the veil of being tough guys, intellectuals, or revolutionaries, and, of course, there are the old stereotyped Toms who let it all hang out and have nothing to hide -- even though some of the things they do are not very pleasant to watch. To see a healthy, intelligent, and able-bodied man stoop to a position where he abandons all sense of his humanity is really a very unpleasant sight. It is disgusting, for example, to see a guard walk up to a prisoner who is flesh and blood just like he is, and abuse and control that prisoner's life. The Toms merely smile and scratch their heads, willing to be the world's flunky for these guards.

Now, what must the Tom's mental state be? He has been psychologically defeated by his conditions and surroundings. Everyday he sees a day like the day before. His life has been like

that of a robot, like a clock, a repetition of the same actions every day. He has seen many days where there was no mail, no visits for him, no hope for him; and each day he has met the face of his captors and rulers with baleful eyes. His captors come to work each day renewed with strength while every day he must bear the weight of a repetitive life. He sees the wall around him, the gun towers, and the mean-looking men in them who are just dying to pot-shot him between the eyes. He meets the captains, each of them six feet or bigger, with many men in their command. This white man wears a white shirt and cowboy boots, smokes a pipe or cigar, chews tobacco or dips snuff, and is sometimes a little drunk. . . . but he is always mean and hateful. This is the racist the inmate has to meet each new day; the person he has had to say "yes, sir" and "no, sir" to for many years; the person whose main objective is to someday turn this so-called tough guy into another Tom.

For years the Tom, the victim, resists the humiliation of lowering his manhood to the big man in the white shirt and his friends and followers. But each day the mail continues to miss him, each day that he seeks a visit and it does not come, and each year the Parole Board turns him down spells victory for the big man in the white shirt. He smiles when he sees the redness in his victim's eyes, for he knows that it is just a matter of time before he can walk up to him and say, "Hey boy, git me a cup of coffee, shun mah shoes, trim mah har, fetch mah coat." Oftentimes, the victim has fought them for many years, knocked many of them down and out, and had many guards come after him in big bunches. This is why I say Toms come in all shapes and fashions. They come from ordinary people, tough guys, revolutionaries and gangsters.

Some give up easily from the very beginning. On the other hand, some who came here as soft as lambs got to the point where they didn't give a damn and went wild. In the long run, they were

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broken down to nothing. The guards took all of their dignity and manhood, causing them to hate themselves. I have seen Toms get to the point where they hate all other prisoners. They eventually grow to hate the man in the white shirt too, but they serve his purpose and side with him. Once this happens, the once tough revolutionary is dangerous to other prisoners. He hates himself so much that when other prisoners remind him of the strong man he once was, he wants to destroy them for possessing the good qualities he once had which are now gone, never to be regained. He will do the guards' work; even attacking other prisoners for the guards and serving as a strong-arm for them for small favors and promises.

Once defeated by the men in the white shirts and their friends, the Tom will be their most faithful servant and flunky. He will do all he knows to try and convince others that his way is the best way. He'll say, "Hey man, you can't beat them; I've tried for ten years. You just can't beat them. This is the best way, man, this is the best way."

The big man in the white shirt chews his 'bacca and smiles and tells him to fetch his coat and shine his boots. The Tom, after he has been broken, will give up all morals; he possesses none. The best Tom in the world is a former rough guy. When it takes five years to break him, it takes a lifetime to remake him. He is finished. He will have spent all of his energy resisting and when they break him, he is broken to bits.

THE LOVE BUGS

This is the term used to describe the men who lay with other men as husband and wife. Some men from the very beginning come here with habits of homosexuality. Others go through a long process before falling into that bag. This is a prison. Some people don't know what that means; so the word 'prison' should be clearly defined. A prison is a place where they send some of the most normal, the most abnormal, the toughest, the most intelligent and also some of the most well-mannered men in this society. It is a place where men are treated more like gorillas than human beings. The prisoner's cage is no better than a gorilla's. It has the same thickness of bars and the same strength as the gorilla's cage. A prison is the worst place in the entire world. It is not a place of rehabilitation, but a place of

dehumanization. That is the best way I can define a prison.

Put all the characters together, locked in these cages, and see what you have: a madhouse. . . As you can imagine, there are some men who are here for rape, murder, robbery, and anything else you can think of. There are some strong men here and there are some weak ones here. But all of the people here are men. The majority of them are very healthy. They exercise regularly, eat three meals a day, get plenty of sleep, work everyday, and most are from 15 to 33 years old. Yes, 90 percent of the men behind these walls are in this age group. They have healthy bodies, bodies that are used to mating with women almost every night when they are on the street. The average prisoner here once enjoyed a healthy sex life; for he comes from that class of people who from a very early age experienced adventures with women. But what I am going to convey to you now, sparing none of the details, is the horror of sex in prison. And if there is any humanity amongst you, then you will see that there is a need for men behind bars to have sexual relations with real women...

One of the saddest sights in the world is that of a man degraded to the point where he daily contradicts nature and himself. Here in prison, men will substitute all things that they miss with anything that they can replace them with. And it is no different with their need for women. Sometimes this behavior is a long time developing, just like with the Tom. The first step that men take when they miss the sexual relations of their wives and sweethearts is masturbation. In prison, it is point-blank called "jacking off." When these healthy men get to a point where sexual desire comes down on them, the easiest and most expedient thing they can do about their passion is to jack off. But that in the long run serves no purpose for these healthy bodies.

Men are healthy here, healthier than the average man. Each morning they awake, their penises are erect. But they have no way of relieving this sexual tension. These are things that come with having a healthy body. Healthy bodies will function normally whether you want them to or not.

When men experience this organic function each morning, how are they to forget that they have this organ? The problem arises when a man knows he is healthy, has this penis and his youth -- and asks himself what to do with it. What

shall be done with all of this healthy body, is his everyday thought. If there were a woman present there would be no question about it. But since there are no women, then shall they let these organs rot and wither away? What then arises is the same question, what to do about it. The ever-present thought of women flickers through prisoners' minds each and every day. It is one of those thoughts that cannot be erased no matter how hard you try.

When the men go to sleep at night, they think of women, and oftentimes they have wet dreams. Surely everyone knows what a wet dream is. These wet dreams are very humiliating. A man dreams of having sex with a woman and it seems so real that he actually thinks he is participating in the real sex act. But as soon as he ejaculates and wets himself up with his own sperm, he awakens and finds that it has only been a dream. He then must struggle to a cold sink and wash himself with a towel and cold water -- and can't possibly get back to sleep. Some men even cry thinking of their wife and women. With this constantly happening, and every morning awakening with an erect penis, the question is forever present: What shall I do with this healthy penis of mine? Must it rot, or shall it be used? Suddenly there arises the habit of jacking off and wasting one's self away by jacking off.

It becomes a common habit. When men become possessed by the thought of their sweetheart, they jack off and try to relieve themselves. Now, in the long run, jacking off just doesn't serve their purpose. They become too tired of making believe that they are enjoying sex with their wives or sweethearts. They see themselves getting lost in an insane dream fantasy and to head off the world of fantasy, they turn to a real flesh and blood human being.

THE PENITENTIARY WOMAN

There are some homos in prison who sell their rectum just as a prostitute on the street sells herself to men. Only here in the pen, they don't call them punks and homos -- they call them "girls" and "women". So hereafter, the homo will be referred to as a woman. When the prisoner who has graduated from the wet dream to jacking off gets tired of jacking off, he will want to try a penitentiary woman. (Right here the reader is asked to use a little imagination.) Just picture a man who for over

a year has been having wet dreams and jacking off suddenly being confronted with a man who has been a homo from his childhood, who has practiced acting, talking and even looking like a woman, who asks this man who has a jacking off habit, Do you want some pussy?

This penitentiary woman wears tight pants that are made to resemble women's pants, wears an afro very high, or, if white, wears hair like the white woman. He-she has very long fingernails, a carefully shaven face, wears perfume, etc. After submitting to this woman, the deprived inmate will be in real trouble. The fantasy that he once had is now double-fold. He thinks he now has the real thing. He calls it "pussy" and calls this boy a "girl". If he can buy this boy from his man, he will. I have seen men buy these boys for several hundred dollars, or rent them for months at a time. They even kiss, marry, and set up house like husband and wife. You can lose your life by touching a man's wife here in prison quicker than on the street. I have seen men who treat women like trash on the street, treat these boys like queens. The reason is that these men have lost everything. They have lost their real wives, children, dignity and everything. The only thing they have is this boy to make them bear this burden of a sentence. They fall deeply in love with these boys for this reason. Their love is deeper than that of some men and women because all they have left in this world is each other. These men will kill your dirty underwear over these boys.

To go a little deeper, let's explore the cells. In the cells there are two men. Now you can't make a man out of a woman. You can try, but a man is a man. He grows a mustache, beard and has everything that all men have. You can't get the man out of a man. He was born a man, and a man he is. There are some men who look like women and there are some women who look like men. But men are men, and women are women; and that's that. (I once had a woman who really looked rough and masculine, but she was a woman and as feminine as they come. She cried a lot, bled every month, had two lovely tits and a vagina and a very beautiful mind. She wasn't as beautiful as some people -- but there was no other woman as feminine, thoughtful, and intelligent as she. She was a woman.)

Everybody in this prison is a man. Some of them may appear shockingly like women, but when they piss, they piss like men. They can

lift as much weight as another man, and they can fight just as hard. They don't have pussys like these dudes fool themselves. They have asses and, in the front, they are just as much man as their so-called husbands. This prison is for men, not women. Every person that comes through that door has a dick, ass hole, mustache and beard. Some may have bigger asses than others, but it's an ass alright and not a pussy.

When these people wake up in the morning, both of them arise with erections, not just one of them. They are both men. They both like women. There are some homos here that look so much like women it's incredible. It is the very nature of a man to want to use his penis on a woman, it matters less whether the woman is a homo or not. The horror of it all is that these so-called women are also exercising their manhood on their men. They put their penis in these men's behinds just as the men put theirs in them until it's hard to say who is who or what sometimes. I once worked in the laundry at the Missouri Training Center for Men and I heard a lot in that laundry. I also saw a lot in the cell house because they had glass windows that one could peep into if he was nosy. (I'm not nosy, but I associate with a lot of people, and if you walk up to a door at the wrong time, that doesn't make you nosy. It's just that someone is out of luck.) I saw a boy doing this dude I knew and he saw me and became afraid. He jumped off the dude's back and the plug came out of him and brown stuff just shot all over that boy's T-shirt. That is the price they pay for love. I had heard that before, but didn't believe it. Now don't get me mixed up. I come from the worst part of the city. I'm no angel. I've seen everything and done quite a bit. I've seen these acts before, I've been jailing for a long time. There is nothing new about what I saw except that my friend was supposed to be the husband and not the wife. What was really different was that I had heard about that "squirt" but had never seen it before.

There should be a law allowing men to see women once a month. Prisoners breed perversion, because men cannot forget women. Those who forget them usually do so by replacing them with a substitute and in the long run these boys do them like they've been done for years, then tell them, "Welcome to the clan, sister."

THE RAPISTS

There are some men who come here straight and strong. But if they are young and nice looking and favor women, they are in trouble if they are not either violent or know a lot of people. There are men here and groups of men who have either had a penitentiary wife or who have been someone's wife themselves and finally break the yoke through black-mail or violence, and start seeking wives themselves. (When I refer to black-mail, I mean that these ex-wives have something on their ex-husbands and have attained liberation through that something.) These two groups are dangerous to young boys. One seeks something he misses: while the other will rape, kill or maim a man just to humiliate and dehumanize him for sexual purposes and revenge. From the very beginning, this hunter was a coward who sought refuge in the arms of another man. For many years, he had been used because of his fear of other men. He had let another man abuse him, kiss him and sexually assault him to protect himself from the goon squad. He had chosen the one to avoid the many sex-hungry others. However, as soon as he gained enough confidence to perpetrate violence on these people, and become well known and sure of himself (sure that he can survive amongst them), he then wants his freedom from the "dick". He sees that had he not surrendered from the beginning, he would not have had to suffer shame, self-hatred, etc. Then he sees a young boy who reminds him of himself, and he hates him. He wants to put that boy in the same spot which he accepted through his cowardice. He wants to rob that boy of what he has been robbed of. His towering hatred builds up even more when he finds that the very man who used him for many years is weak himself; thus showing him that his own weakness did not have to be, had he resisted.

He knows that his cowardice was the root of all his shame. He hates himself even more when his so-called man is found to be weaker than he. He wants freedom and gets it through black-mail or rebellion. This type of person is very dangerous. He wants to deprive more than he wants sex. He wants as many people like himself as he possibly can get -- this way he can hide his shame among the multitude of degraded men.

For if all are degraded, then he is normal. This person will run in bunches; most in the bunch are just like him -- a herd of cowards. They carry the most hideous looking weapons, wear rags tied about their heads, and have hateful looks in their eyes and the cloak of shame in their shadow.

They want to be vindicated of their shame, but increase it through their deeds; becoming sicker and sicker and more sadistic than before. Woe is he who is not violent before them and vicious as the black cat and the crow. Their victim must be well known and liked if he is to escape. If not, then he must be super-vicious. Sometimes even this won't help. For the rapist says, "Fuck or die." Believe me, they mean every word of it. If they can't rape him, then they would rather see him dead in his grave. Shame be their name.

THE SILENT KNIGHTS

There are some people here who from their very looks spell danger. It is amazing how some people can get by without ever being abused, harrassed or meddled with. There are some dudes here who are very odd. They are quiet, shy, evil-looking as the day, and seem to lurk about the prison like a cat tipping on its toes. They are well-mannered, intelligent, easy-going, very friendly and well reserved -- but DANGEROUS.

This is no joke. This is the truth. Such people are not loud-mouths or meddlers. Even the guards don't fool with them. They'd like to, but they just don't. They've had too much experience with this type. These people break no rules and provoke no one.

Some people try to imitate them to duck trouble or rapists. But these people cannot be imitated. It is their very nature to make it impossible for anyone to imitate them. Many people go five or ten years before they even speak to them. They must be careful not to provoke them because they're DANGEROUS. No joke. The guards talk to them very nice and kind. They would really like to kick them in the ass, but these people will kill them, and then kill themselves. They're DANGEROUS.

THE BLACK MUSLIMS

I hope no one becomes offended about what

I'm to say here. I like the Muslims, but I don't particularly care to adopt their philosophy. My view of the Muslims is one of respect, but not of awe. The Black Muslims, I must say, are together in many respects. They are the most organized group of people I have ever seen in my entire life. I have seen a lot of Muslims, but the ones at this state pen are the most organized, disciplined and brotherly that I have ever seen. They practice brotherhood and they practice their faith better than any Muslims I have seen. They obey 100 percent. They are non-political, non-radical, non-militant. As long as no one interferes with their Islam, then there is no sweat. They don't swear, participate in homosexuality, smoke, eat pork, or do hardly anything else except practice Islam and work. I think they are fanatics about their faith. But I too am fanatic about everything I do. When I believe, I believe 100 percent. These brothers are the same, they will kill you if you curse Allah or his Messenger. You'd better not call Elijah Muhammed Elijah Poole. Call him the Messenger or nothing at all. You may call him Mr. Muhammed, or the Honorable Elijah Muhammed, but if you can't call him one of those, then you'd better not let his name fall from your lips at all. You'd come out better by ridiculing one of them. They'd only call you a dead-world brother and leave you be. But don't play around with the Messenger's name, for God's sake. They'll do you in, brother, they'll do you in.

They all sit together, eat together, pray together, and study together. When young boys come here and want to duck the "dick", they go to the Nation of Islam; and woe is he who rapes them. There just ain't no room for him here in this place -- no sir, as they say.

Here in Maximum, I had a Muslim cell-mate for a few days. I knew from the very minute he darted in the door that he was a Muslim. There is something about their manners that reveals them to me. I can see one of them anyplace in this nation, and, if he's a true Muslim, I can tell by his manners and habits, and that is the truth. This Muslim was put in my cell, and I said to myself, This dude is a Muslim. He was a new man, had only been here for a week and they put him here in Maximum. I said to him, "Asalaam Alaikum," and he said, "Walaikum Salaam, Ila ha, 'Illa Allah Akbar, Salaam Aki." I said, "Salaam." This dude told me that I was not a Muslim but he respected me for respecting his

belief and the Messenger of Allah, the Honorable Elijah Muhammed, who was taught by God; who came in the person of Master D.W. Fard who was a black man and a silk salesman in Detroit, Michigan. This Master D.W. Fard supposedly drove an old Ford car.

When the Muslim found that I had an abundance of Marxist philosophy in my cell, he more or less withdrew from me. For Karl Marx and V.I. Lenin are white devils made by Yakub, the mad black scientist. He said, "I see you're a Marxist." But he was wrong. I am a black man and I'm an American citizen. I can't deny this. I live here and my people shed their blood here and I'm getting my share of their blood, sweat and tears, even unto death!

Trapped with this brother for a long time and there was no conflict. They say a materialist and a person who believe in gods can't get along -- that's a lie. I got along with this Muslim brother. This brother prayed for me to get released from the grips of the devil. Well, a preacher prayed for me once too, a Christian preacher. I prayed with them both, because if there is a devil that's got a hold of me, I want him loose. Due to the fact that I've been jailing for six long years, if we have to pray for some peace -- I know a prayer can't hurt anything -- I'll pray. I have had no trouble getting along with the dudes here at the Pen, and if a prayer will further prevent trouble, what's wrong with that.

There were some more Muslims brought down that night. It was the third of July on a Tuesday and they stayed here for six days. I watched how they did their thing together. It was something else. When they did their ablution, I heard them call down the line, "Brother Theodore X ready," and the next would say, "Brother Sonny X ready," "Brother Robert X ready." "Brother Robert 2X ready." Then they'd turn around and say, "Prayer position intact." They'd be facing the east and they'd pray and when they finished you'd hear them sign out, "Asalaam Alaikum Uki" and there would be the echo, "Walaikum Salaam," all down the line. In the morning before the sun rose, I'd be awakened by the same sound of running water and a repeat, "Brother Theodore X ready." etc. When they finished praying, there was the echo, "Asalam Alaikum Aki... Walaikum Salaam."

These brothers do their time and leave other folks alone. But if you jump one of them, then you've sinned and the wrath of Allah will befall

you because these brothers will shout "Allah Akbar, Allah Akbar," and do all they know how to do to you. The first time I heard that shout, a guard jumped Sonny X from behind and tried to choke him. There was the shout "Allah Akbar," and the sound of the guard's grunts and groans and yells for help. Sonny X kicked his ass real, real, real good. Walaikum Salaam. What a pretty sight.

THE MARXIST-LENINISTS

This has got to be the most studious group in the Pen. Where they are, there is the ever present picture of President George and the first lady Angela -- not George Washington, but George Jackson and Angela Davis. We know about Brother George. We've seen the big men in mercy. George Jackson was one of the tougher men, they had to kill him. But had he been here, he would have been dead long ago. In fact, about ten years ago. There are some brothers here who are just as intelligent as George was (rather, there were some brothers here).

Brother Frank Chapman, the first brother to teach Marxist philosophy, is one of these intelligent brothers. He is intelligent and tough. This dude is about 6'2" tall, weighs about 195 lbs., and can't fight his way out of a paper sack. This brother can't whip nothing, but he's a tough guy. He can take his lips and chop you up into little pieces with his head. He can take a good ass kickin' and solitary confinement too. Ever since 1961 he's been teaching a lot of brothers. There have been many confrontations with these people and Brother Frank usually takes front street or acts as spokesman. Being the spokesman may not sound like too much to you, but here at MSP it can cause you your life because these white shirts will snatch your breath out of you, and that's no lie.

THE MURDER OF THOMAS TAYLOR*

George Jackson was surrounded by racists, but not like these. MSP has the worst racists in the whole world and the most dangerous. These racists will come in gangs ten and twelve strong to get one man. They will beat you to death and nothing will be done about it. For example, in 1969, a very close associate of mine by the name of Thomas Taylor, who had done 14 months in seclusion, was released from solitary confine-

ment to return to the general population.

Taylor had been confined to Maximum as an "incorrigible" prisoner for stabbing another inmate. After his release from that shut-in cell, Taylor was so psychotic that none of his former friends would associate with him. He came out of seclusion with the thought that he could leave his body and possess the body of another person. He thought that his body had been ruined by being put in that shut-in cell all of that time, and that if he could get the body of another person, he could regain his stamina. The problem was that there was nothing wrong with his body; his mind was the problem. They had ruined his mind.

From the very sight of Taylor, one could see that he was off. His eyes were cocked, his face impassive and his equilibrium off. His conversation was as insane as one could hear in a lifetime. Some of his friends put him off on my table. They said that I would let him eat at my table. Here in prison, you must ask if you can eat at certain tables. If not, you can get yourself killed. I told them yes, because all of my friends had gone home and I had a big table to myself. Taylor would sit there and just stare at me all the time, but I didn't know why. This went on for several weeks until he got tired and ceased. He told me later that he gave up on me. I asked what did he mean and he said that my mind was too strong and he could not get my body; that he wanted my body because it was just right for him, a good, strong body. He said he gave up because he couldn't get in. I felt very sorry for him.

I checked into his situation and found out how he was driven insane. He was put on the same tier with men on death row, all of whom had lost their minds, and shouted and screamed all night and all through the day. He had no one to talk to but these people who had been driven mad by the thought of dying in the gas chamber. When he came out of that seclusion cell he was really psychotic. He never talked to anyone except me and another brother named Earl Simms. We were bringing him back to life and he was getting much better; but everytime someone would upset him, he'd have a set-back and his condition would get worse. He was a very good chess player though, and it was this that helped him get himself back together. We would help him by playing chess and criticizing his scheming after a new body, and we would laugh with him and treat him kind.

Just at the time when Taylor was almost back to himself, the guards started picking at him. Me, Earl Simms and Thomas Taylor worked together at the tag plant here at MSP. What set Taylor back and lead to his death was an Uncle Tom nigger named Captain Cairy.* Now Cairy was not a captain. He was an old Tom who had been a guard and was given the title of shop foreman by the prison administration. This job went to Cairy's head, but he never pressed anyone but black prisoners. He demanded the maximum of work out of us, but he never confronted the white prisoners. Cairy never pressed me or Earl Simms as he did the rest of the black prisoners. He feared that we would possibly go berserk on him, as he used to think we were vicious. He was mistaken -- it was not us, but Taylor. I wouldn't have wasted my life for that no-good Tom. Neither would Earl Simms. We warned Cairy several times not to press Taylor because Taylor was sick -- a very sick man.

Cairy wouldn't listen. He kept pressing Taylor. Taylor walked up to Cairy one day with a knife under his coat and just stared into Cairy's eyes and Cairy seemed to be in a trance and just stood there as if he were hypnotized. For some reason, Taylor didn't touch him. This evidently worried Cairy for he seemed to have lost face. The following day he came back and asked Taylor what was the meaning of his carrying on, and did he think that Cairy was afraid of him. Taylor's eyes became blood red and he told Cairy to leave him alone and walked away. Earl pleaded with Taylor not to do it -- but he went berserk. Taylor walked up to Cairy and stabbed him in the neck with a foot-long shank that was as sharp as a razor. Cairy was so shocked that he couldn't move -- he was paralyzed. Taylor stuck him again and again, and Cairy ran into the office where there was only one way out. He was so shocked that he ran past two outdoor exits into an entrance office -- where Taylor pursued him and worked on him. When Taylor left Cairy, he did so only because he thought he was dead.

When the guards came, they had pistols drawn. They sent everyone inside the halls and later we saw them struggling with Taylor and dragging him up a hill. He was laughing and fighting. He said, "I know you motherfuckers are going to have some fun with me, but I don't give a damn," and spat into the face of a guard over 6' 3" who weighed about 300 lbs. For

several days, loud screams came from down here in Maximum where I am writing this essay, and from the same side -- the seclusion side.

Taylor was beaten to death. A man who worked at the hospital saw Taylor's body and said that all of his teeth were out and that he checked Taylor's body and his head, ribs, arms and legs were broken and crushed. They said that Thomas Taylor's death was a suicide, that he hung himself.

STRIKING BACK

All of the prisoners here were scared to death behind that. There was a small guerilla band who wanted to kill certain guards but feared the "snitches". This place is full of them because the white folks here at MSP are expert racists -- so-called "nigger breakers" got these niggers scared to death. So the inmates who wanted to snuff out these hate-filled guards were not afraid of the guards; they were afraid of the other inmates.

Several months later, another brother was attacked and thrown down a flight of steps. He was another psychotic named Geronimo, after the Indian chief. The brothers got real emotional that day. They were ready to tear the joint up. It started in G Hall, where the single-man cells are. This uprising was spontaneous and very emotional. Everyone in G Hall wanted to riot, but they weren't organized and no one knew how to coordinate the people into a disciplined group. Two quick groups formed: one group was made up of Frank E. Chapman, Big Joe Reed, Big Lionel Jones and Richard Styles; the other was Eddie McGee, Little Richard McDaniels, Kerry Brown and myself. We had gathered half the wing and Chapman and the rest had gathered the remainder. Chapman and his group said, "We may as well burn this motherfuckin' place down because that's what they're asking for." Eddie McGee suggested a strike to avoid a lot of killing of the brothers. Big Frank Chapman thought that was a good idea and called for attention. He first pointed out men whom he felt should be on a committee to confront the warden. This was not a well-planned thing; it was a spur-of-the-moment strike and organizing. He appointed Lionel Jones, Joe Reed, Richard Styles and Eddie McGee; but McGee declined, so Frank Chapman picked me out. I wouldn't have known what to say,

other than to call the warden a bunch of "dirty motherfuckers" and tell him that he knows god-damn well that he's no good and that he should not do us like this.

Brother Frank got a stool and jumped up on it and said, "Now I want complete silence," and you could have heard a pin drop in there. He told everyone that the first thing he wanted was to have unity and cohesion and that if all did not agree, then it was just no use having a strike. He explained all of the hazards of the strike, what to expect and what to do and what not to do. As soon as he started talking good some brothers began running around trying to take some ass hole. But we finally got everything together on what to ask for on the demands. There were no big demands, we only wanted an immediate end to these brutal murders, better food, more pay, and an uplift in prison living conditions.

When the warden came, he had about 20 guards with him in hard hats and with shotguns. I was surprised at the courage of the brothers; they were really angry. The warden said, "Okay, let's clear out before someone gets shot." This time the brothers were so hot that they said, "Fuck you, honky, go 'head and shoot." One brother grabbed a stool and splintered it and passed out chunks of it and the warden started laughing. The brothers broke up mop sticks and passed them around and started cursing and telling the screws: "Come on in here, motherfuckers, come on in." Chapman held them cool and the warden asked him was he the leader. He said yes and called Warden Samson* a bunch of "racist KKKs" and "despots" and a lot of other sophisticated names that quite frankly embarrassed Samson.

The warden told Frank to bring his delegation up to the office to discuss the matter like intelligent men. Just at that time, John Larue Johnson walked in the door and Chapman felt that he should take my place because he was more experienced in handling these kinds of things. We were well instructed that if they did not return that we should not work until their release. When they came back, no demands had been granted. So we went on a strike that was not to end until the demands were met. Everyone had been informed that B Hall was to join us and this was the whole black population with the exception of the honor halls. We refused to rack back the doors and go into our cells. Half of the hall was armed with

stainless steel shanks or clubs or pipes.

Suddenly the State Troopers showed on the scene and the warden spoke through the loud speaker and told everyone they had just one minute to get to their cells and take down those barricades. When that minute was up, the brothers had not moved and were holding on to their shanks. The warden shot his riot gun into the ceiling and for 20 minutes or better, you could hear the plinging of shanks hitting the floor, the dropping of clubs and the frenzied scrambling of prisoners to get the barricades away from the doors and get back inside their cells. There were near fights going on. People would throw their knives down in front of other folks' doors, and prisoners would be saying, "Motherfucker, don't throw that shank in front of my door; get that shit out from in front of my door."

The warden came inside with the troopers and they called us out of the cells one by one at gun-point. They shook down the cells, searched us all and insulted some. They put a shotgun to the head of my next door neighbor who was only 15 years old, and insulted him. It was because he had been sent here for killing a young white boy in Kansas City. This young fellow was not afraid in the least. He showed no fear and told them to get that thing away from his head. I'll be truthful -- I was more shook up than he was. He didn't know what I knew. These racists are for real and it shocked them to see such courage from a young boy like that. He doesn't feel the same about the matter now; he's much more mature.

They took Chapman and the rest of the leaders to Maximum Security. The strike lasted for three days. The guards went over to B Hall, pulled out their rugs, tables and lamps, broke up some of their "love affairs," and the people in B Hall signed a slip to go back to work. In B Hall, there are two-men cells, which means a lot of hanky-panky is going on. The guards knew: no "hanky-panky," no "strikey-bikey." B Hall came out of their cells on the second day.

They put the rest of us on one meal a day, bologna and cheese. The brothers cried like little sucklings that they were hungry. We reminded them of the promise they made to Frank Chapman and Joe Reed and the rest. These brothers said, "Fuck Frank Chapman, I'm hungry. I want some food." They used B Hall as an example, saying there was no use holding out since B Hall had gone back to work. Also the white prisoners were

saying that if the officials would let them have their way, they'd come in and get these niggers out and make them go to work. So when the warden came over to get signatures to go to work, there was a stampede to sign papers.

At the end of the year (1972), another strike was scheduled. This time, those same white racist prisoners who wanted to vamp on the brothers for striking against the administration, were conducting a strike and asking for black participation. Some of the very same brothers who refused to strike with Blacks were the first to join. This one was a madhouse. Everyone started participating. It was going okay until some wild young cats went on the rampage and set fire to the very cell house we had to sleep in. They turned on the hot water, flooded the whole cell house and burned mattresses until we couldn't breathe at all. The steam from the hot water coupled with burning mattresses overcame those of us who lived at the top walk where all the smoke came to its head. We broke out windows in hopes of getting air, but to no avail. The young punks who were leading this thing forced us to vacate the premises. Those who remained were coughing up soot for days on end. This came from foolishness and nonsense. That strike lasted about a day.

The following year, there was another strike by the whites. And again they asked for black participation, but this time no Blacks would help them because not once had they participated in the black cons' efforts. They joined the prison system whenever Blacks were abused; but when they suffered the same brutality, they wanted black unity. This time it didn't work. They sent threatening notes and remarks and really became bold. They sent notes saying that if they caught Blacks out in the yard, they would kill us. At the time the white population outnumbered us almost three to two. The white prisoners said they were going to attack us one Monday when it was about 95 degrees. Every Black in the entire place was told to come to the yard, young and old. Those who remained behind would be killed. There was 100 percent unity. We were taped with newspapers and magazines and had on coats and hats. The hats were padded like helmets, and some had hatchets, shanks, pipes, clubs and bricks. Very few whites showed. They could be counted on one hand and were escorted by Blacks who were their hanky-panky partners. The word was given to the guards to only shoot

Blacks. A prisoner heard the captain say this over his walkie-talkie. So we were lucky that the whites didn't come because we would have been shot down like dogs.

The past two years have been hell for Blacks in this place. The guards kick ass for fun now, simply because there is little or no resistance. 1972-1973 were very brutal years. Many prisoners were hospitalized, beaten and threatened. The racist associate warden, David Warrick*, and his goon squad are the main reasons for this fear. This man is sadistic. He is insane with hate for black prisoners. He is as brutal as a racist can get. He is so sadistic that he cannot confront a black person without stepping on his toes, pinching him, or doing some little thing for hate's sake -- if it's only bumping up against you.

In December, 1972, Sonny X Townes defied white supremacy when a white guard, who was David Warrick's nephew, jumped him from behind and tried to choke him. Sonny X subdued this racist with a series of left jabs and straight right hands. Brother Sonny was given two years for defending himself from his brutal assailant. The same month, Leroy McKinney, Luther Williams and Brother Frank Chapman were called up to the captain's shack and confined to Maximum Security for possessing law books and Marxist literature. These anti-marxist racists jumped these brothers, along with Virgil Pearson who received multiple gashes in his head. Frank Chapman received broken ribs and a fractured jaw. The same night, Brother Bobby Ellis, Frank E. Johnson, Tyrone Ambrus and a homosexual named Lee Wong, were brutally beaten by the anti-black prison guards. Brother Frank Chapman was swiftly transferred to Kentucky State Prison.

On January 16, 1973, Brother Dean Johnson called for a prison work stoppage to protest the recent brutalities and near-killing by the administration. The demands were as follows:

1. Recognition of the humanity of all prisoners at MSP;
2. Release of Sonny X Townes, Luther Williams and Leroy McKinney from Maximum Security;
3. Appointment of Blacks to the Parole Board (with a prison 60 percent black, there is no Black on the Board);
4. Appointment of an ombudsman;

5. Due process of law from prisoners confined to Maximum Security;
6. Meaningful vocational training;
7. Conjugal visits for all prisoners;
8. Furlough for eligible prisoners, void of racialism and favoritism;
9. Community participation in prison reform;
10. Permission for inmates to own and operate the inmate canteen to cease exploitation and high prices;
11. Minimum pay wages for prison labor;
12. Resignation of the racist administration;
13. Return of Frank Chapman from Kentucky State Prison;
14. Establishment of an Inmate Adjustment Center to be run by the prisoners instead of the administration;
15. Establishment of an Inmate Committee on Prison Reform; and
16. Longer visiting periods (many inmates hardly ever receive a visit, making longer visits a necessity).

RETALIATION

The strike was broken by the associates warden's terror tactics and intimidation. The night of January 16, 1973 was one of horror in J Hall. Brother Dean Johnson was jumped while his hands were shackled behind his back and flogged over the head with a club until his face was disfigured. He received 14 stitches in the face. He was also thrown down a flight of stairs. Brother Dotson was carefully beaten over the knee with a club until his leg was shattered in six places. He may even lose that leg. Brother Glen Amerson was thrown down a flight of stairs, beaten and sprayed with mace, with his hands shackled behind his back. Brothers Wyman Dentman, James Sherley, Albert Bradford, Virgil Pearson, Herbert Rollands, Luervyle Tidwell, Charles Arrington, William Cheeks, Frank Lindsey, Henry Brown of New York City, and I, received merciless and brutal treatment by the administration on account of the demands mentioned above.

I have personally been attacked several times for refusing to withdraw a federal law suit filed in the U.S. District Court. My life has been threatened and I have been locked away in Maximum Security and denied all privileges granted other prisoners in Maximum.

The policy of the prison officials is to harass, beat or even kill Muslims and Marxist-Leninists here. They fear that these two beliefs will engulf this prison and bring an end to its white racist rule. The followers of the Honorable Elijah Muhammed and Marx are a threat to the homosexual rapes and racist murders which go on here. They are a driving force for unity

and for an end to the racist and inhumane abuse in this prison -- an end to prisoner exploitation. Prison policy is therefore to destroy them.

Jesse Lang, Jr.

*The name has been changed.

POSTSCRIPT

It is now unfortunately the fashion to romanticize prisoners and the struggles they wage within prison walls. The Institute of the Black World decided to print this essay as our 1974 Special Report because of its particularly unsentimental nature and its perceptiveness of the realities of black prison life. We also felt that it showed undeniably the relationship between Jesse Lang's world and our own black world "on the outside."

This essay was sent to us earlier in the year by Jesse's sister, who wrote in her covering letter:

"Jesse filed suit against Missouri State Pen in January of 1972 (for harrassment by prison personnel). Since February, 1972, he has been kept confined in Maximum Security, where his privileges are very limited. Since Jesse wrote this essay (July, 1973), he has been hospitalized several times because of nervousness (a result of being confined for such a long time)." He was, by the way, eventually talked into dropping the suit during one such stay in the hospital.

Jesse is now in good health and studying to take the High School Equivalency Test in the fall. We should also mention that State Representative Fred Williams of St. Louis has been working diligently (and often without result) to bring the plight of Jesse and his fellow prisoners to the attention of state government.

We were asked specifically by the author to use his real name and those of other prisoners. Nevertheless, in order to protect Jesse, we have changed the names of some of those mentioned. The opinions expressed in this essay are not necessarily those of the Institute.

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The Institute of the Black World



by JESSE LANG

INSIDE MISSOURI STATE PENITENTIARY: Observations of Number 14922



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