

From behind the wall



by Larry Baker #35021
O.S.P. Correspondent

Black inmates file petitions for a variety of reasons — a girlfriend being denied visiting privileges; being sent to isolation for a rule infraction; the confiscation of personal property; a guards abuse; discrimination of race.

Many complaints have been filed in aversion to the food. One petition alleged, "Judge, you wouldn't believe how grown men can foul up even hot dogs. The salad always has unidentified objects in it and the coffee would drive your car six miles."

The petitioner summed his case in conclusion: "Our cooks is crazy, Judge."

Officials and guards at the prison are not unduly concerned about the constant flow of petitions or being named as defendants in lawsuits. One guard expressed little concern, and sentiments are shared by most of his colleagues. "Writ-writing keeps them (inmates) busy. If a con has a beef, I'd sure as hell rather see him hit the law books than hit me." (Fortune News, 9/77)

In the Oregon State Penitentiary, there are no George Jackson's, no Eldridge Cleaver's or Malcolm X's. Black men, who were convicted by courts, thrown into dingy prison cells — only to emerge among society "social outcasts" with the undeveloped hidden skills and knowledge that terrorizes our courts, and prison officials today. The treatment of Black people behind stone walls and iron bars. It was through the eyes of a ballpoint pen, gliding across pages, and volumes of paper which revealed true stories and events of their prison experiences as well as others. They soon had the public vomiting with guilt in knowing that their tax-paying dollars were condoning such treatment administered. It was through these written materials that laws were changed; procedures were enacted and investigations were lodged.

Sure, during the 60s and early 70s prison riots were born; prison strikes were formed — even right here in this great state we found our prison on fire — the names of Attica, San Quentin, Joliet, Walla Walla and McAlester became topics of conversation. To the Black women standing in welfare lines; topics of conversation to men of dark color in bean and potato fields; words of fear within the eyes of small Black children in rundown ghetto classrooms. Why? Because most of them all had something in common. All were poor, most lived in Black communities and most had a loved one — a father, brother, uncle, cousin or husband — confined within.

But today these names are slowly vanishing, along with the memories of the violence that came with them. The buildings and cell blocks have been rebuilt on their compounds or either revamped old ones with a new paint job. Even those human beings who had died senselessly by bullets, clubs and tear gas bombs have all been buried, some without a tombstone, but the fear lives on in the minds and hearts of Black people in their communities and prison cells.

Why must there always be violence before a problem is recognized?

Why has this states Black prison population jumped from 125 Blacks (10%) in 1970, with an average total population of 1,200; to well over 300 Blacks (19%), with a slight rise in population of 1,400. A question that not only many of the white leaders of this state can not answer, but many of the Black leaders shade their eyes to and refuse to answer. It can not be blamed on the rising Black population within Oregon (25,000 in 1970 to 30,000 in 1977). It was slightly over one percent of Black people living in Oregon to total population 1970, and it is still slightly over one percent today.

At work right now is another riot desperately trying to be created by a handful of Black prisoners at O.S.P., but this time it is a hope that not one drop of blood will be shed, not one head will have its brains bashed in, nor a cell will be damaged. This time the battleground hopefully will be a courtroom instead of a "Big Yard." The bullets will become the ink pen; the clubs will be sheets of paper; and the guns will become legal law books. It has clearly been proven throughout the past fifteen years that "the pen is still mightier than the sword."

Yes, prison riots have clearly taught one main lesson — it is they who suffer, it is they who become the victims, the targets, the losers.

Portland City Commissioner Charles Jordan, a Oregon Black man and leader, stated that, "during 1976, 39 percent of all those persons who were arrested in Portland were Black," as written in the October 16, 1977, Calvin O.L. Henry column. Henry went on to question, by writing, "One cannot help but wonder how many of these Blacks were convicted and sent to Oregon State Penitentiary. What happens to these inmates educationally?" Well, at least Henry makes it a point to try and find out by volunteering his time each week to come behind the walls and teach a Black studies course — where is Jordan?

Since March of this year a small group of Black inmates, together with a small group of white inmates, have formed a group with the purpose of not starting a riot, not to fight a war between themselves, but to gain knowledge — knowledge of Oregon law. Since its inception the group has grown greatly. It was done voluntarily as well as being self-taught. This motivation has drawn the attention of attorneys, law professors as well as even judges, throughout the state, to the point that they themselves have stepped forward to assist these inmates' needs voluntarily.

This fall a full course mini-summary will be presented to help thirty inmates continue to gain and become more knowledgeable within this field. Those summaries will be provided by the Willamette University People's Law School, under the guidance of a third year law

student named Terry Johnson, and it will go as follows:

- October 26th — Prisoners Rights.
- November 2nd — Appellate Procedure.
- November 9th — Parole Procedures and Probation.
- November 16th — Misdemeanor Crime and Your Right.
- November 23rd — Wills and Probate.
- November 30th — Divorce and Child Custody.
- December 7th — Self Divorce Clinic.

Attorneys: Larry Matusar, Tim Spofford, Gary Babcock, Scott McClaster, Marc Sussman, Mary Dahlgren, and Ann Hubard.

Paralegal: Sandy Hobach.
Third Year Student: James Rhoades.
Circuit Court Judge: Judge Edmond, Bend, Oregon.

People who have stepped forward, following in the footsteps of Judge Robert E. Jones, Attorney Bob Cannon and many others.

No, there are no George Jackson's, Cleaver's or Malcolm X's here at the Oregon State Penitentiary. Convicted Black felons who became national heroes to Black people suffering in prison, communities and counties by letting their Black voices be heard throughout the courtrooms in America.

No, there are none here, but there maybe — someday.

by Ron Flynn #32199

Under the constitution an accused person has the right to face his accuser, but not at O.S.P. This fact is more flagrantly flaunted in regards to the "reliable informant."

"You have been accused by a reliable informant who's identity must remain anonymous" is the standard text of a good percent of the disciplinary write-ups at O.S.P. The reliable informant has and can still cause:

1. An inmate to be returned from the Annex, and lose his custody because a "reliable informant" thought he was going to try and escape. If an inmate were planning such a move he would be stupid to relate his thoughts to another.
2. An inmate to spend fourteen days in the "hole" while a reliable informant's information was investigated. No proof was found, but you cannot reclaim fourteen days in the "hole."

The reliable informant does not have to back up his story, after all, he is reliable. An inmate can present a defense on his own behalf, but the following quote indicates his chances are as the proverbial snowball in —

"To call witnesses — limitedly — A) Other inmates, or staff members who are working in the institution or whose duties take them within the institution may not be called as witnesses since their testimony is unduly hazardous to institutional safety and correctional goals; B) other persons may not be called as witnesses if their testifying is unduly hazardous to the witness, institutional safety and/or correctional goals..."

Who does that leave to present as witnesses. Your reliable informant is not as reliable as their.....

A creature as silent as a snake, as repulsive as a hyena, burrowing as a mole

and evil as a wolverine, who will destroy its own limbs to save himself. Most outstanding characteristic about this animal is his distinctive "brown nose."

For some reason, this "thing" only surfaces under an alias of write-ups, secret reports and other devious paraphernalia of the establishment. It cannot sustain itself on its own, but most cling like a leech, sucking the blood of its own kind, never hesitating to dig, burrow and claw to survive.

Its name, as applied by the establishment, is in itself, a mockery. Reliable: "Refers to a person or thing that can be depended on as in need or emergency and often connotes levelheadedness or steadiness." The first statement in the dictionary is more descriptive although it was unintended. "Applied to a person or thing that can be counted upon to do what is expected or required." The informant can truly be depended upon to do what is expected. It has to in order to survive.

For some reason, the "reliable informant" never seems to have as much prestige or carry as much "reliability" unless he is beneficial to someone who cannot carry their own program and must depend upon this source to fall back on. At this point, the "informant" is all knowing, all seeing and indisputable. But what is there to dispute? A shadow? A make-believe phantom? Who can argue with a non-entity? Why confuse the establishment with facts, when its mind is already made up?

It is sorry indeed, when intelligent(?) men must depend and use these THINGS in order to accomplish the ends to which they seem to thrive on, and to lower himself to the level of such a being. Could this be evolution in reverse?

by Thomas Tarrell #38943

There is a thriving interest behind the walls in mens magazines, such as: Playboy, Penthouse, and others. These sex-oriented magazines are sold by the prison canteen for a substantial profit, and the inmates — who are separated from most aspects of human normality are naturally aroused by this vast outpouring of literature depicting what they are denied.

Oregon had the chance to give prisoners conjugal visits, but because the administration did not support it, it failed. So on one hand they sell us sexually arousing material and on the other they deny us any normal outlet for

this arousal. Why? Because conjugal visits would be too expensive. Too expensive, how much is it worth to save a marriage, how much is the mental well-being of 1,500 men worth? How much is it worth to save men from homosexuality?

Is it truly the will of the people of Oregon that these intolerable conditions of broken marriages and shattered men continue unabated? I don't think it is. There are 2,000,000 people in this state and the administration claims it would cost \$400,000 for conjugal visits. Would you pay 50c to save a marriage, or 50c to save some 19-year-old from being homo-

sexually abused? That's what it would cost the citizens of Oregon, 50c a piece.

How can the administration deny our basic human sexuality and then turn around and exploit that sexuality for a profit? In my opinion this is a classic example of a highly confused policy or intentional cruelty.

What is the solution? The only realistic solution was denied us by the administration and the legislature. Of course they could stop selling the magazines — but then what would be left for these lonely frustrated men in their bleak 6 x 8 cells. I leave the results to the imagination of the reader, because my mind recoils from our alternatives.

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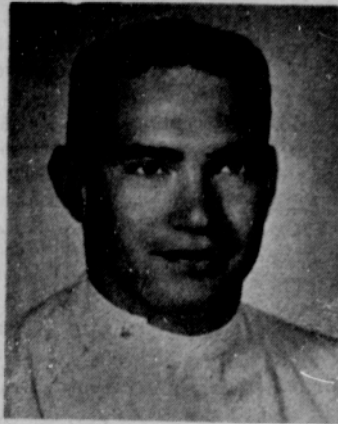
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