

Listen, kids who die—
Maybe, now, there will be no monument for you
Except in our hearts
Maybe your bodies'll be lost in a swamp
Or a prison grave, or the potter's field,
Or the rivers where you're drowned like Leibknecht
But the day will come—
You are sure yourselves that it is coming—
When the marching feet of the masses
Will raise for you a living monument of love,
And joy, and laughter,
And black hands and white hands clasped as one,
And a song that reaches the sky—
The song of the life triumphant
Through the kids who die.

- Langston Hughes, "Kids Who Die"

"To Struggle Means We're Alive"

prisoners speak out on Ferguson,
Baltimore, and the ongoing
revolt against the police



"To Struggle Means We're Alive"

oners, because prison accepts and admits that it's at war with prisoners, whereas society doesn't admit that it's at war with those within it.

OK, so just to get concrete, I think it'd be great to see the bonds and the groupings that are being made and formed from uprisings on the outside, during lulls on the outside these shouldn't be breaking apart but should be trying to spread their organizational tactics, which is really what's lacking in prison, to the inside. Send literature, differ-

ent agitational materials. Eventually there will have to be a level of coordination—like, in places like Alabama and California, and probably other prisons in Georgia, I know there's a lot of coordination and organization going into a lot of these hunger strikes and riots that are happening. So if we can start a culture of this type of coordination that goes beyond the prison wall, so that people on the street are coordinating with people in prison,

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I think that's the necessary precondition to make sure that when we storm the bastille, we're storming all the bastilles. That when there's a large enough prison revolt, there will be support on the outside strong enough to actually tear down these walls.

"To Struggle Means We're Alive"

prisoners speak out on Ferguson, Baltimore, and the ongoing revolt against the police

Introductions

What follows is a series of interviews with and articles by prisoners on the recent wave of Black-led riots, uprisings, direct action, and protest against the police across the US. The conversations and correspondence that resulted in these pieces took place mostly in the spring of 2016, marking some time since the beginning of the 2014 uprising in Ferguson, Missouri. Reflecting on the ongoing rebellions that have reverberated on both sides of prison walls since that summer almost two years ago, the insights and clarity of these pieces feel no less immediate.

This project emerged organically, after trading ideas with several prisoners I've corresponded with off and on as part of a North Carolina (anti-)prison news bulletin. Folks wanted their thoughts on #BlackLivesMatter and the recent riots to be amplified on the outside, as well as to have an avenue to distribute and further these conversations in their facilities. After being immersed in my own way in the insurgencies of the last two years, albeit as a white person, it felt like there was a lack of visibility of prisoners' own thoughts on this struggle, especially the analysis of "social" prisoners who may be actively resisting on the inside but have little of the recognition or activist cred of known political prisoners.

just Georgia or prison in general...like, I've lived in Atlanta my whole life, which is very different than the rest of Georgia, and I didn't realize until I came to prison how 'country' Georgia is, and how racist white people in Georgia are. And like...old school racist, you know?

And so, people rightfully assume that if you're white you're probably racist. So, in a way it gave me a good opportunity to make it clear that I'm not that to a lot of people. And then also to confront racist ideas by using...OK, so, certain white prisoners would be against the riots just because they were Black people doing it, but then I could easily say to them that Black people are standing up and fighting the police, and they should be commended for that. You know because almost everyone in prison hates the police. And I could say that white people need to stand up with them in order to start a culture of cooperation between us, and that's the only thing that will allow us to beat them. And that resonated with a lot of people I think even more than the very deeply ingrained, reactive, racist responses that were happening.

5. What do you think the relationship can or should be between these anti-police rebellions on the outside and resistance inside prisons? Is there resistance or organizing going on at your facility you want to mention or hold up?

Yeah, absolutely they should be connected. Like, the uprisings and the riots and stuff are only the beginning. And these things [police and prison] are so interconnected that there's no reason they shouldn't overlap. The sort of, organizational bonds that these riots and uprisings give us the opportunity to form are the necessary precondition to start sending in what's necessary to agitate and build up... Like, there's an underlying level of resistance in all pris-

likely to hear, "Yeah we can fight back, but we should do it together" than, "We shouldn't fight back." So that's nice. But yeah I do have feelings about these arguments. I was

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that's the sort of sentiment that I often hear in here, that "this is how police look at us [Black people]." And unfortunately there's also the sentiment, that's probably true, that "that's how most white people look at us."

4. Were other prisoners talking about these rebellions, and if so, what kinds of conversations were they having?: Did it stimulate discussion, organizing, and/or resistance in your facility? Did it feel to you like there was a racial dynamic to how prisoners reacted to the news of these mostly Black uprisings? Was there more or less racial unity with regards to anti-police sentiment in the prison? Did it seem like white or Latino/a prisoners could relate?

Definitely, yeah. So, I kinda went into that with my last answer, but I'll go more into it. It of course stimulated conversation, but here, I think, not in the way your question hopes for. It didn't stimulate organizing, or at least not that I was privy to. But it gave me a chance to—like, I don't know if it's

actually thinking today, remembering something like a chief of police, I think during Baltimore, that "police were the last line of defense against the savages", referring to the rioters in Baltimore as savages. And of course, that's a really loaded, clearly racist terminology and has a strong connection to a long racist history. And

The folks who contributed to this small publication come from a variety of backgrounds, politically, racially, and otherwise. They are Black and Brown and white, gay and straight. The pieces have been minimally edited for spelling and grammar but not content, with the hope of preserving as much as possible the quality of prisoners' voices on the page. Some contributors have chosen to remain anonymous, while others gave their consent to be named. Most of these prisoners are people I've written with for years, though when word of the publication started spreading, I began to hear from people I'd never talked to before, and a couple of these pieces reflect that.

I hope to be a comrade to those behind bars whenever possible, but I am not an "ally" to them, or any other heterogeneous group for that matter. Rather, as an anarchist I've tried to represent myself as transparently as possible politically to those I correspond with, avoiding the dynamic that comes from passively following leadership and instead at times engaging in active debates with people. Sometimes this means actively choosing to work with some prisoners rather than others. Though there is absolutely a (constructive, I hope) variety of political viewpoints represented here, my own affinities are likely made clear.

I should point out that there is an unfortunate shortage of women prisoners' voices in this 'zine. This is primarily due to the proportion of male to female prisoners in North Carolina facilities, where men outnumber women roughly ten to one, though perhaps it is also representative of the strengths and weaknesses of my own relationships. Certainly there is no shortage of rebellious women at NCCIW or most other women's facilities, and there is a strong history of North Carolina women resisting their confinement and subjugation at the hands of the state.

"To Struggle Means We're Alive"

With recent prison riots and strikes in Texas, Nebraska, Michigan, and Alabama, and the widespread hunger strikes that spread through California several years prior, we're living in a time when prison struggles are building intensely. These efforts are primarily being initiated and self-organized by diverse crews of prisoners outside of established activist organizations or networks. Support on the outside has also grown, however, and is currently playing a role in amplifying news of a national prison strike set for September 9th, the 45th anniversary of the Attica uprising.

This surge in activity unfortunately coincides with the increased prevalence of reformist and even "abolitionist" rhetoric among politicians and their loyal opposition in the world of non-profits and esteemed activist organizations. Whatever their intentions may be, if historical precedent serves, these forces will act to preserve whiteness and capitalism by inaugurating new methods of discipline and social control to replace the old.

In this context, I hope that this publication can prove useful to comrades and accomplices on both sides of the wall, that future struggle against prisons will be as impossible to control as it is to contain, and that these prisoners' words speak to others as they have spoken to me.

-anon, NC
Spring 2016

on] and that's when I started hearing people talk about it, like in the chow hall and stuff.

2. How did you react?

I was kicking myself that I came to prison just as this was happening! And then I was trying to figure out how to take advantage of it in the situation I was in. And so you know I was just, just trying to—for part of that time I was being processed in the diagnostic prison. And there was like no communication out of there, just letters and stuff. The major feeling at the time was just that I was missing out on something. Oh, and really wanting to urge people to act in the situation with a mindset that it will end, and with a vision toward how we can get the most out of it while it lasts.

One refreshing thing about being in prison is you almost never hear people make moral arguments against militancy or hard tactics. They only ever make tactical arguments against it, and generally not.

3. There were and are a lot of contradictory and conflicting elements to these protests and rebellions. Right-wing media has used coded, racist language blaming "thugs" and "criminals", while left-wing media and some activists have also at times decried the rioting, blaming it on "outside agitators." Do you have thoughts on these conflicts over tactics and strategy? Do they resonate with debates going on over resistance inside prisons?

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The following interview was conducted with Luke O'Donovan, a young white man imprisoned for using a knife to defend himself against a gang of homophobic attackers during a party in Atlanta, GA. He is due to be released from prison in late July 2016. You can learn more about his case at letlukego.org

“to storm all the bastilles”

*Luke O'Donovan
Washington State Prison
Davisboro, GA*

1. How did you first hear about the anti-police uprisings and #BlackLivesMatter protests in Ferguson, Baltimore, Oakland, and other cities, of 2014-2015: friends and family; other prisoners, corporate media, and/or radical publications?

Yeah, it was friends and family. The day I went in, I think, is the day Ferguson started. And so first I heard about it on the phone talking to people, and then, maybe even the day before I went in. But people from St. Louis were sending me write-ups on stuff that was happening and keeping me well informed. And I was talking to friends.

(Was news of that also making it into the facility by radio or TV?)

Yeah, but it didn't feel like a big deal at that point. I was at the county jail then, and it didn't seem like a big deal. That's when it was first happening, and then I guess stuff happened again after the non-indictment, and I think that's when it became a really big thing in here [at the state pris-

*“For freedom we want and will have,
for we have served this cruel land long enuff,
and we are full able to conquer by any means.”
-correspondence between slaves, 18th century*

*“Those who are locked up
know better than their jailers
the taste of free air.”
-Hélène Cixous*

"we are a social force becoming aware of its power"

*XXXXXX
Lanesboro CI
Polkton, NC*

I first heard about the anti-police uprisings and #BlackLivesMatter protests from the news and media. What's sad is that it took Ferguson, Baltimore, Oakland, and Charlotte and other cities to see what's going on in our cities around the world and what the police are doing to Black people and Latino/as. Just look at what happened in Durham to Chuy Huerta. When are we going to realize that change needs to occur in ourselves and society in this corrupt country. Day by day on the news or in our eyes we are subjected to see or undergo police brutality, racism, discrimination, and injustice by the same people whose job it is to protect and serve. Honestly I'm tired of seeing my people get treated like we're inhuman and outcasts, and naturally its bad in the prison system. They feel like because it's not them that they are doing this to, it don't matter. The system don't care about people of color. We're the game to these killers in black and blue uniforms. They either destroy us or put us into Federal, Sate, and County facilities, or try and deport the Latino/as.

I say this because I'm going through all these things at this time. We got to become conscious of what's going on, because Blacks and Latino/as are being targeted and it's clearly time for a change, time to destroy the system of this racist and wicked government, stand up against racism, police brutality, and injustice, fight the powers that be, and make change, because if we don't these things will continue to

actions we came up with.

Anyhow, as others got the news, they started beating on doors, screaming "Fuck 12!" and all kinds of shit. Eventually comrades on the outside started sending me reports in the mail on the riots, and as I shared them with others, guys started attacking the CO's with feces and piss, a common tactic of warfare in the lockup. Fireballs of paper and clothing was being thrown off the top two tiers.

After receiving more literature of what was going on, like the Nation of Islam and New Black Panther Party telling the sistas to get off the streets and trying to quell the rioting, I became disheartened because we keep allowing these poverty pimps to turn potential insurrectionary moments into the same old bullshit reformist direction.

As a matter of fact, at this moment [May 2016] we are on workstrike here at Holman Prison here in Alabama, and just today we had a gang leader state that we need to leave the CO's alone and keep things nonviolent. But he turned right around thirty minutes later and held a beatdown on another gangmember. No violence against the pigs, but its OK against each other. A pig sent him [to our unit] because since we've been on strike they've cut back on our food portions, and it was stated that if it keeps up, there was going to be some actions.

See, the same recuperative methods used in the streets is being used in the prisons. But I can say that the riots in Ferguson have inspired a lot of the actions in here, because whenever there's a planned action Ferguson and Mike Brown's murder is mentioned as examples of the oppression that Black folks suffer in the good old USA.

tation with them. All my life I've seen my family members, friends, and strangers suffer brutality from the kops, even murder. I've never had a positive encounter with the kops.

Anyhow, I waited another hour for the news to come back on the radio to make sure that I had the details correct. After hearing again that Michael Brown was shot, I hollered through the vent to the guys in the cells above me and told

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and only marching, and the family suing the police departments for monetary damages, when it's evident that it's no deterrence to the killing of Black, Brown, and poor whites.

When the riots popped off, the way it was being reported made me think that just maybe Black folks had had enough of this bullshit. That this was the beginning of the revolution. A couple of others here expressed the same sentiment. That finally some pigs were going to do some dying and not us alone. And the guys above me shared my thoughts, but then we began to talk about what it would take other than taking out some pigs. I won't go into the plans for future

happen. As brothers all around the world we need to stand up and come together and protest for every single man and woman. They are going to keep killing us and keeping us in slavery. That's why we need to get all the education and come together on the inside and outside, because we all have somebody we love or who loves us. So let's stop hurting each other and come together to stop these uniformed killers on the outside and in the prison system. That's why we need the people on the outside, to stand by us and to come up with plans for the youth and the people that's getting out of this prison system and are willing to help themselves.

We need society connecting us, not solely with other predominantly white social movements but also with the many people who survive without compromise in this world on fire.
We need society connecting us, not solely with other predominantly white social movements but also with the many people who survive without compromise in this world on fire. We are not individuals acting on our moral impulses—we are a social force becoming aware of its power. Becoming powerful is a matter of making our story a place to inhabit, of making our story material. We dream in the face of nightmares, not as an escape into an alternative reality but as a weapon to change this one. Because not only do Black lives matter, and Latino/as, but all lives matter. So outside world: the people on the inside of these prisons need your help too, because we are being killed by black and blue uniforms. Just look at what happened to Mr. Michael Kerr at Alexander CI on 3/12/14. We all need help.

With Love to the world,
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"a sense of everyone feeling like, 'about time'"

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Bertie CI
Windsor, NC

1. *How did you first hear about the anti-police uprisings and #BlackLivesMatter protests in Ferguson, Baltimore, Oakland, and other cities, of 2014-2015: friends and family; other prisoners, corporate media, and/or radical publications?*

I first heard about the anti-police uprisings and #BlackLivesMatter protests through the media, newspapers, radio, and television. Also it was a discussion that friends and family were having amongst each other about the realer portrayal finally being shown about the systemic injustice within the "justice" system that is built into the thread of our society to the point of being a constant perpetrator of the ills of this society by being based on archaic ideals that

have nothing to do with justice.

If I was shocked about anything it was the persistence of the protesters to pursue the issues on the basis of the facts and not be persuaded by the system, either by intimidation or pacifying.

was the persistence of the protesters to pursue the issues on the basis of the facts and not be persuaded by the sys-

2. *How did you react? What were your initial thoughts and feelings?*

My reaction wasn't shock or disbelief because I've been living this reality for the majority of my life. If I was shocked about anything it

Michael Kimble is a 49-year old Black, gay anarchist serving a life sentence for the murder of a homophobic, racist bigot. He has a blog and has been an active voice among prisoners at Holman correctional facility in Atmore, Alabama, where there have recently been several riots, as well as strikes in conjunction with the Free Alabama Movement. You can read more writings from him at anarchylive.noblogs.org

Reflections and Reminiscence on the Murder of Mike Brown

*Michael Kimble
Holman CF
Atmore, AL*

While in segregation listening to the radio news report, it was reported that a young Black male by the name of Michael Brown had been shot and murdered by a Ferguson, Missouri kop. A blind rage came upon me, but being in segregation, in a single cell consisting of brick and steel, there wasn't much I could do to express my outrage adequately. See, I'm an anarchist who has been locked down for a long time and have been the victim of brutality of kops my entire life. My first time seeing a kop as a child was when my mother got into a physical confrontation with them. All my life I've seen my family members, friends, and strangers suffer brutality from the kops.

abused by officers in their schools—the word of authority is no longer gospel. While not all officers are evil and there remain shining exceptions that seek to serve the interested of their communities, there is an undeniable problem with any organization that, by either omission or commission, allows for monsters in their ranks.

I wish I could tell you there were some major discussions or resistance in my prisons but I can't. I've spent 7 1/2 years in the midst of a sociological experiment gone horribly awry. I have met only a precious handful of socially conscious individuals over the course of my incarceration. Many of these women have never voted and would continue to do so without knowledge or regard of how many African Americans and women

fought for the rights of future generations, our generations. What I want the public to know is how tragically young many of the women in prison are, Black women especially.

These girls have been failed by all the social systems, the public school system, and finally by the criminal justice system, simply shuffled through from one to the next with a lack of concern that is criminal in itself.

At NCCIW, which is the large maximum security women's prison in Raleigh, there is no cable television and mail and magazines are closely monitored. We were frequently denied material that they thought might incite or inspire, and any correspondence they deemed questionable. I like to think that the lack of interest in any of the revolutionary movements stemmed from a simple lack of information, but maybe that's just what I like to think.

tem, either by intimidation or pacifying, to let things go. I started really paying attention, at first I thought it was just another movement where it would be more about the persons/person pushing the movement than the cause the movement was born out of. So I'll say my initial thoughts were, "Here we go again with people trying to come up off the misfortune of others."

3. There were and are a lot of contradictory and conflicting elements to these protests and rebellions. Right-wing media has used coded, racist language blaming "thugs" and "criminals", while left-wing media and some activists have also at times decried the rioting, blaming it on "outside agitators." Do you have thoughts on these conflicts over tactics and strategy? Do they resonate with debates going on over resistance inside prisons?

I believe with so many people involved in the issues it is inevitable for there to be conflict on several levels, not only in ideology but strategy, and personal and group agendas. Excluding those that are involved solely just because and not for the cause, I feel like everyone's actions can push the talks into actual steps towards reforms. Throughout history from all groups of people with differing views on tactics against government tyranny there has been debate on the best tactics, so this is not an issue exclusive to our times or this movement. There was always conflicting thoughts on strategy on the same objectives, for every Martin Luther King there was a Malcolm X, every W.E.B. Dubois a Marcus Garvey, and all their actions shaped and pushed reform in their times. No change for the better has ever happened without those two elements. You need the reasonable voice to convey in an articulate way the demands of the movement, and the muscle to show why its best to listen to the voice of reason.

"To Struggle Means We're Alive"

The commercial and right-wing media is an extension of the ruling party—as a tool for propaganda they are doing what they were created for, so it's nothing new about them criminalizing everyone and everything that threatens their views and self-imposed rights to their positions in society. It's all a cointelpro program in progress. I'm pretty sure the British saw the “founding fathers” as “criminals” and “thugs” as well. They revolted over taxes and high-priced tea, much less than the atrocities they commit today against their own citizens and then call “justice.” Now there's a holiday around those “thugs” actions.

4. Were other prisoners talking about these rebellions, and if so, what kinds of conversations were they having?: Did it stimulate discussion, organizing, and/or resistance in your facility?

Of course people are in here discussing the rebellions and cheering the resisters on. It's been a sense of everyone feeling like “about time,” because those of us who have been living through the reality of the semi-covert, organized hostility towards certain groups of society to see it aired out and picked up by those in a better position to resist with effect gives us a sense of validation and encouragement. It felt as though before this nothing we said against these people would get taken seriously, as if by them being a part of the system of justice they were incapable of injustice, and we were all just sore bitter individuals. Now that people are coming to realize that it can happen to anyone anywhere for any reason, getting wrongly accused and jailed, killed by officers walking anywhere or even sitting in your own home. It's encouraged guys in here to do their part, and due to the fact that we are all convicted felons we know our limitations in the roles we can play effectively, so we embrace the radical and militant part where force may be needed. Even still, we discuss other aspects of the move-

“I can't even successfully lie to myself”

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Swannanoa CC

Black Mountain, NC

I would usually be the first to proclaim, “ALL LIVES MATTER,” in my self-deluded effort to eliminate color lines, but the statistics rise to contradict me. The number of African Americans that have fallen victim to police-related shootings and violence so far overshadows all other races combined so that I can't even successfully lie to myself. In our society that lives in fear of the ever present threat of terrorism, African-Americans and Native Americans have been subject to domestic terrorism from the dawn of this nation.

As long as power and authority have existed, they have been abused. Police killing people isn't some new phenomenon with a market freshly cornered by young and inexperienced officers. This is their culture...

As long as power and authority have existed, they have been abused. Police killing people isn't some new phenomenon with a market freshly cornered by young and inexperienced officers. This is their culture and it is to a large extent accepted, standard operating procedure. Until the advent of our new digital age, the system was built on their word versus ours, with ours not counting for much. Now the tables are turning because technology is providing the irrefutable proof that our testimonies lacked. From unarmed men gunned down in cold blood, to children being appallingly