

the fastest growing sector—and especially women of color. Finally equal justice under the law.

Prisons have become a key source of labor, with many transnational corporations contracting with states to manufacture goods and set up telemarketing stations. TWA and Eddie Bauer sporting goods use prisoners to work their phone reservations and orders. Microsoft Windows 95 was packaged, shrink-wrapped, and shipped by incarcerated workers. The State of California put it this way: “Why go abroad, when you can have a disciplined workforce here at home?” in a video to entice more corporations to join the “Joint Venture-ship Program” of placing factories in prisons. As more and more U.S. businesses become entwined in this booming industry, it seems harder and harder to reverse this trend, even though crime rates are low everywhere but on television.

However, in response to these conditions there are a variety of resistance activities that range from grassroots demonstrations to full page ads in *The New York Times* to save Mumia Abu-Jamal, convicted of killing a policeman in a patently unjust trial. Abu Jamal is the first internationally recognized U.S. Death Row prisoner since the Rosenbergs were executed during the Cold War (<http://www.mumia.org>). For many in the United States, Mumia is “the Voice of the Voiceless” (the title of a radio show which he hosted before his arrest), the symbol of those masses behind bars, and a figurehead for the broad movement of those who are resisting the prison industrial complex.

The counter-prison movement includes ex-prisoners, families of prisoners, Quaker and other religious peace activists, victims for reconciliation, human rights workers, Vietnam vets, the Bruderhof (a Christian communist network of communities numbering several thousand), academics from sociology to geography to cultural studies, philosophers, lawyers, parole officers, and guards. For this diverse crew the Internet has become a major tool.

There are countless web sites for individual prisoners and pages for organizations and coalitions. An organization in Berkeley, the Prison Activist Resource Center, has been a central node (<http://www.prisonactivist.org>) in much of the

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## The Undisciplined and Punishment: On-line Resistance to the Prison Industrial Complex in the United States

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IN THE PAST several years a lively list-serve group has evolved that addresses issues of incarceration and justice in the United States. Each night I log on to messages that range from desperate pleadings for someone's life to cautious discussions of what the slogans should be on the posters for the next Free Mumia march. There are technical descriptions of prison architecture and quests for herbal cures to cell block bronchitis epidemics. It is the underside of one of our leading industries: locking people up.

Prisons are a big business: construction of cells, outfitting of facilities, training and equipping guards are some of the expenses of an industry that is sapping state and local funds for education and welfare. In the past seven years California has increased prison spending by 500 percent while scaling back higher education by 25 percent. In the state capital of Sacramento, the prison guard union is the biggest lobby, outflanking tobacco and agribusiness. The prison contractors, law enforcement suppliers (stun guns, barbed wire, restraint suits, etc.), and the guards' union were able to join forces to pass the Three Strikes Law to ensure long terms and full cells. The United States has more people per capita behind bars than anywhere else on earth. At present almost two million people are behind bars: five million are in the system if you include those awaiting sentencing or on parole. Women are

activity, maintaining both a list-serve and a web site with numerous links. The center was one of the central organizers of the successful Critical Resistance Conference in Berkeley in September 1998, a gathering of over 4,000 prison activists and spokespersons.

Prisons are usually located in rural areas, far from the urban centers where most of their population comes from. A growing trend in incarceration is to having private corporations contract with states and cities to house prisoners. One of the results of the increased privatization of prisons is the fact that prisoners are moved across state lines. Someone arrested in Missouri could end up in Texas, where the cost of maintenance is lower, and access to legal aid and human rights may be harder to come by. One way that prisoner's families use the Internet is by creating individual prisoners' pages with personal histories, art work, poetry, and addresses. Usually posted by parents or spouses and friends, these sites become a virtual presence of the loved one, who is often far from home. Although many prison families do not have personal computers, they can log in at the local library, school, or cyber cafe. There is an anecdote that a cleaning woman in a large New York law firm logs on in the evening not only to activist sites, but also to on-line law journals and case records to work on legal strategies for her husband's case (<http://www.find-law.com>).

A mother's site is at <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/1526>. A site to browse on high-end machines is <http://people-oftheheart.org/index2.htm>. (Watch out, it crashed my computer with all its streaming video and graphic arpeggios.) It's an amazing story of an eleven-year-old child who has been sentenced to twenty-five years.

The Internet can also be a way to find out the latest instruments of repression. There are many industry sites where you can order handcuffs and pepper spray ([www.counterterrorism.com/copex.html](http://www.counterterrorism.com/copex.html)), and there are counter-cop sites such as <http://www.prisonactivist.org/copwatch>. Hundreds of service organizations are posting sites, like activists against unjust sentencing (<http://www.sentencing.org>) and the Bruderhof Chris-

tian radicals (<http://www.bruderhof.org/hold/issues/deathpen/inmates/index.htm>).

There are many artists' web sites addressing these issues. The graphics collective Third World War has posted a series of comic strip-style drawings and texts. David Thorne and others have created a series of posters which are posted online (<http://www.igc.org/prisons/resistant-strains>). Various political prisoners have posted drawings of their cells, and many sites have prisoners' drawings and paintings. There are many prison poems and drawings on the Deep Dish site (<http://www.igc.org/deepdish>). A web page of the Critical Resistance Conference is archived there. I worked with Gina Todus, Chris Burnett, and members of Paper Tiger San Francisco to stream audio from that conference and post cultural material and statistics from the conference. The site has been accessed by thousands of users and is still being updated.

An overview of prisons in the United States is posted at <http://members.tripod.com/gmoses/prison/plinks.htm>, and one on the maximum security isolation units is <http://www.igc.org/prisons/cpf/CPFshu.html>. Many black nationalists see the U.S. prison system as genocide and compare it to South Africa under apartheid; they have a web site at <http://www.amandla.org>.

A list-serve with postings of many messages a day is maintained by the Prison Activist Resource Center. The purpose is to provide news alerts and pointers. For some the Listserve is literally a matter of life and death. The most desperate messages are the pleas from mothers or wives or children trying to enlist help to beg for pardons as the execution date nears. There are currently almost 4,000 people on death rows awaiting executions. E-mail campaigns have been used successfully to get medical attention for sick prisoners or to obtain eyeglasses, and there is always hope that a flood of messages will startle a governor or member of the state supreme court to take notice and review a capital case.

The prison list-serve is the center of many controversies. One very active member is Cayenne Bird, who is said to be the wife of an inmate who was killed by guards. She is quite patriotic, and her site has billowing American flags as a background. She has been critical of the fact that former Black Panther and ex-

Communist Party USA member Angela Davis has emerged as one of the main leaders of the prison activist community. Cayenne does not consider herself a radical and spends much of her time trying to register voters; her site is located at <http://hometown.aol.com/jumplaw/politics52/index.htm>.

Cayenne has many ongoing arguments with other list-serve members. For a very brief period of time, a volunteer working on the site tried to manage the postings by editing the mail. The hue and cry that ensued was deafening and worse than all the ongoing spats. He quickly apologized, and the site continues in its free form and often cantankerous manner.

At its best the list-serve is a true lifeline for the thousands of prison activists and families of prisoners out there waging what have been lonely battles against powerful state and corporate apparati and the peculiar form of state slavery that has evolved in this post-Cold War World. The prison movement for many of us battle-scarred lefties is the final battle: one which looks at the true end stage of "free market" capital. We are looking at the face of fascism in America. We are the enemy.