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Cruel But Not Unusual— The Punishment of Women in U.S. Prisons 2001

Susie Day: You both were arrested and imprisoned in 1985. How have prison conditions around you changed over those years?

Marilyn Buck: They've become much more repressive, particularly since Ronald Reagan's presidency. Each year, there's been slippage. And certainly [President Bill] Clinton played a big role with the Anti-terrorism Act, which further limited people's legal rights.¹

The balance of who is in prison has also changed. There's a much higher percentage of blacks and Latinos, and—at least in the Federal system—an enormous number of immigrants.² Not just immigrants but foreign nationals, who've been arrested for incidents in crossing borders. People are detained for years without ever being given any kind of judicial decision.

Laura Whitehorn: I think it's typical of Marilyn not to complain in an interview about her own conditions. When we look at the two million people now in the federal and state systems, the proportion of women in those numbers has gone way up. What that means to someone like Marilyn is tremendous overcrowding: You're living the rest of your life in a tiny cell that was built for one person and now houses three. It means you have no property, because there's no room. Little by little, they took away any clothing that was sent to you, and put down much more stringent requirements. It means that you have no desk. Marilyn Buck, like many prisoners who fight very hard to get an education, has to sit on a cot and write on her lap. The overcrowding means that people are treated like problems and like baggage.

The other thing is the federal conspiracy laws, which are particularly pernicious for women. In 1985, when people heard that I was facing thirty-three years, they were astounded. That seemed like so much time. In 1990, when I ended up with twenty-three years, people were less

astounded, because the laws had changed and sentences were much longer. By then, my cellmate had a twenty-four-year sentence on a first offense. This was a drug conspiracy case where it was really her husband who had run this drug ring, and she was swept up in the indictment. Or there's our friend Danielle, who has a triple-life sentence for another drug conspiracy—her crime was basically refusing to testify against her husband. We found many more women with those kinds of sentences.

Day: How do you think these last fifteen years have affected you, personally?

Buck: Imagine yourself in a relationship with an abuser who controls your every move, keeps you locked in the house. There's the ever-present threat of violence or further repression, if you don't toe the line. I think that's a fairly good analogy of what happens. And imagine being there for fifteen years. . . .

To be punished, to be absolutely controlled, whether it's about buttoning your shirt; how you have a scarf on your head; how long or how baggy your pants are—all of those things are under scrutiny. It's hard to give a clinical picture of what they do, because how do you know, when you're the target, or the victim, what that does to you? But there's a difference between being a target and being a victim.

Whitehorn: The largest proportion of guards in federal women's prisons are men. That's who's in your living unit. That's who's looking through the window in your door when you might be using the bathroom or changing your clothes. There's the total loss of ability to defend your person.

For me, the hardest was the pat-searches. In the federal system it's legal for male guards to pat-search women prisoners. That means they stand behind you and run their hands all over your body. The point is not to locate contraband; it's to reduce you to a completely powerless person. If I had pushed a guard's hands away they would have sent me to the hole for assault. In fact, that did happen once. It reduces you to an object, not worthy of being defended. The message is, "your body is meaningless, why don't you want this man to put his hands all over you?" Very, very deeply damaging.

Marilyn talks about being "a target or a victim." She makes a distinction. That's really important because the struggle inside prison is to refuse to be victimized. Once you allow yourself to be a victim, you lose your ability to stand up and say, "I'm a person; I'm not a piece of garbage."

But over the years, when you have to put up with that again and again, you avoid situations because you just don't want to go through it. You have to exert an enormous amount of psychic energy to remove yourself from the situation, where this guy's running his hands over your body.

You end up exhausted at the end of the day, and your nerves are shot. Your only life is resisting these situations.

Day: Is there a portrait of a typical woman prisoner you could draw?

Buck: No, except in the broadest strokes. Typically, she's a woman of color. When she first comes to prison, she's twenty-three to twenty-four years old. Probably the median age of women here is thirty-five to thirty-six, which is much older than it used to be because women stay in prison much longer. Presently, in this particular institution, over 50 percent of the women are Latin American; a large percentage of that, Mexican. You could also say—and this is not news—a lot of the women here come from abusive relationships, whether parents or husbands. . . . If you look at the statistics, it says up to 80 percent.³

Whitehorn: I would also say that a huge number of the women are mothers. It means that, on the outside, there are basically a lot of orphans. I consider the prison system today to be a form of genocide. Prison has been used against third world populations inside the United States, in particular African American and Latino populations. These women are very young when they come to prison. They have sentences that will go through their childbearing years. Their children are either farmed out to relatives, or they become wards of the state. It means that the women, who would form some sort of collective bond when there's a need for struggle, are gone from the community. And it means that their children may well go to prison themselves. Those of us who grew up *with* mothers have complaints that we didn't get enough love. What does it mean to have your mother in prison?

One thing that would strike me whenever people came in from the outside for something like an AIDS health fair—we fought very hard to have those fairs—is that these straight, middle-America types would be sweating bullets, they were so scared. And they would be so expansive and warm when they left. They would say, "My picture of you all was so wrong. I pictured these killers with knives in their teeth, and I find you're just like my neighbors."

If you look at the number of women in prison, some of us are your neighbors. I don't care where you live. People who read [*Monthly Review*]: Your neighbors are in prison, okay? I must have met thousands and thousands of women over almost fifteen years, and I would have to say that, of the women I met, there are probably ten or fifteen who, in a socialist society, would need to be in prison.

Day: Do women ever get "better" after they go to prison?

Buck: Sometimes. I think there's the possibility of coming to terms with the fact that you were abused. Basically, you have two things happen-

ing. One is that you have this potential, because you're not running around, doing the things you had to do as a mother, a wife, a partner, or as someone who had to go to work. When that daily activity stops, then the potential exists to discover a sense of independence.

The other side is that we're in a situation where we're absolutely controlled. That sort of enhances another abusive relationship. It can limit your imagination and shut you down. So a lot of women become more creative here, in terms of arts and crafts, but it doesn't necessarily open them to their potential as human beings.

Whitehorn: Also, a lot of women who have been in abusive relationships get into lesbian relationships. And one of the things the chaplains do is preach against homosexuality, because they're terrified of it. I was once in a prison where there was a progressive chaplain who told other chaplains that for a lot of the women, these relationships were the first time someone looked at them and saw beauty and not something to be used and abused. There were also some horrible lesbian relationships that were a recreation of the worst in straight relationships.

Can we talk about medical care? The women are getting older. A lot of women in prison are going through menopause. Many have gynecological problems. I had surgery when I was in prison. . . . There you are: You're bleeding; you've had surgery a few hours before. You're strip-searched, shackled, chained, and you have to walk back to a van. If you're lucky they'll have a wheelchair for you to take you back to your unit.

I now work at *POZ* magazine, and a woman in Danbury Prison wrote a column for the magazine. She has HIV and goes to the male gynecologist to be told that she needs surgery on her cervix. She says to him, "I have to be completely sedated for this operation." And he says, "No you don't." And she says, "Yes, I do. I have a history of sexual abuse and I have a panic attack when I have to lie on my back with my legs spread open and chained in front of strangers."

And he laughs at her. He tells her, "Well, then, we can't do the surgery." And she writes, "I hate my doctor. And that's a problem. For me, but not for him." That's so profound. That relationship of being "cared for" by someone who sees you as their enemy is completely deleterious to your health.

I hope everyone who reads this interview is familiar with the medical crisis in the California women's prison at Chowchilla. "Health care" there is left to the guards: they are trained as low-level EMTs and they do the first stage of triage, deciding whether a woman should be seen by a doctor or not. Seventeen women died in that prison last year alone, and independent investigations concluded that medical incompetence or refusal of medical attention contributed to the deaths.⁴

The other thing I saw so much in women was the further erosion of already low self-esteem. What does it do to you to have to go stand in line and get a man's attention and ask him for sanitary napkins and then be asked, "Didn't you ask me for some yesterday?"

Day: How do you deal with the deaths of family and friends while you're in prison?

Buck: My mother died about six weeks ago. She became ill in September, so I went through a phase of real guilt that I wasn't there. And real sorrow and real anger. I think I've looked at the guilt a little more. I just couldn't be there. But the sorrow of not being able to hold my mother's little bird hand by the time she was starving to death from the cancer . . . just breaks my heart. And there's nothing I can do about it.

I could intellectualize it. I could have been on a ship halfway around the world, and we got stuck in the trade winds and couldn't get there in time. But I'm an extreme realist and understand who I am as a political prisoner. I knew that I would not be allowed to go to her bedside, nor to her funeral. That was just the reality. She died on a Sunday. And she was buried on my birthday. So it's just all very hard.

I talked to my mother every week I could. And she came to visit me once a year. It was hard for her to get here. My mom was seventy-four. She had to drive a long way and go through all the emotional turmoil that you can't avoid when you see somebody you can't do anything for. So I had to look at her anger, too.

In a certain way, I want to be able to lie on the floor and bang my heels and cry and scream, but that just hurts my heels. . . . So what can I say? I'm having a hard time. I'm having a very, very hard time. I . . . you know, it's grief. But it's grief under dire conditions. I'll always miss my mother.

Whitehorn: One of the hardest things about being in prison is losing somebody you love and being unable to be there with them while they're dying, or go to the memorial service afterwards. Being in prison through some of the worst years of the AIDS epidemic meant that I lost friends, both on the outside and the inside, very dear women who were among the best friends I've ever had in life.

My father died while I was in prison. I was very fortunate that there was a chaplain who allowed me to phone him twice, while he was in the intensive care unit. It's just an emblem of how families are destroyed by prison—the fact that Marilyn was not permitted to go; that I was not permitted to go to my father's funeral; that there was no question of ever being permitted to go.

Day: What kinds of internal resources have you developed to deal with these years in prison?

Buck: For me, the main thing is that I recognized, after the first five years of being imprisoned and on trial a lot, that one tends to build one's walls, which means that you begin to censor yourself, so that they can't censor you.

I censored how I spoke to people, how I interacted. It goes in tandem with, "If I button my shirt the way they want, they won't attack me for not buttoning my shirt properly." In some ways, I found myself trying to be a "good girl," because then maybe they'd see I wasn't a "bad girl."

When I got a handle on what I was doing, I was horrified, because how can you be a women's liberationist and worry about being a good girl or a bad girl? What I believed in my gut was being turned inside out by my actual life. And it made me understand a lot more about how any woman—it doesn't matter who you are or what you think—can get in a relationship with another person—generally a man, but not always—who can become your abuser, your owner.

So once I could begin to see that, I tried to find ways to tear down my walls, to protect myself less. It's always a risk, because when you open a door, you don't know what's going to come in, or what's going to go out. And everyone is needy in prison. When you're a prisoner, you're needy. It's emotionally, psychologically devastating. But I felt like, if I didn't take that risk, that I was going to smother the essence of who I was.

What I do is that I write. I write poems. Over the years I've moved from being a rhetorical, frozen writer to try to put out more of who I am, and how I feel. . . . I think that ultimately, if we want human liberation, we have to be able to be honest with ourselves and other people about our desires, our resentments; as we say these days, our "issues."

So I look to that as a little flame before my face. I can't say I'm there. But I can at least keep that in my mind.

Whitehorn: I think the hardest thing to maintain over the years, for me, was my sense of outrage. After a while, your heart hurts so continually, you begin to build a sort of padding around it. For example, one of the hardest things for me in prison was at the end of the visiting period, when you see children being led away from their mothers and they don't understand, especially the little ones are just screaming and crying. I got to a point where I would try to leave my visits early because I couldn't stand that any more.

I really started to disrespect myself for that. I felt like, the mother's going through it, how do you get the right to remove yourself from it? I think from that, I understood something of why people don't want to know about prisons, because it's too hard; there's something so painful about seeing a woman being removed from her baby. A woman who gives

birth in most U.S. prisons gets somewhere between eight and twenty-four hours before she is taken back to the prison and separated from the infant.

When people say, "God, how did you survive prison?" I think the way I did it was by touching the lives and being touched by the lives of women around me. I mean, I was in prison with women who had been raped repeatedly by a stepfather when they were between seven and eleven, who had to go through pat-searches every day, through shake-downs where some man comes in your cell and paws through your underwear. They would call home and find out that their daughter, who was thirteen, was again being abused by that same stepfather, who was back in the picture. They had to deal with the most intense levels of abuse, and yet were able to stand up through it, were able to survive.

I learned early on how people can communicate with each other on a really deep level without having to give up their own personal strength. I learned how to get emotional sustenance from the women around me and how to try to give some to them. That's the main thing I learned from prison. And it was easy for me because I knew I had a release date. For someone like Marilyn, or our friend Danielle, finding the strength to survive is an enormous job.

Day: What reactions do you get as a political person from other prisoners?

Buck: Most people don't know my politics specifically. As I get older and tireder, and more beaten down by being in prison, I'm not out there as much with the population. I don't go to the dining room very much. I'm too tired to do that. So less and less, people know me.

But some people do understand my politics. You know, one woman who's twenty-two years old just left. A young black woman. We talked sometimes, and I have been supportive and critical of her in a couple of situations. When she left, she said, "Thank you. You helped me a lot."

So, to me, what your politics are in the abstract don't mean a damn; it's how you practice them. For myself as a white woman, I ask, how do you treat people; how do people receive you as a human being? Are people abstractions to you, in terms of racism? Or do you treat people as real equals, even given all the issues of privilege? Because they exist in prison, too.

Sometimes I'm treated differently by the administration. I know that my mail gets opened. That's not true of everyone else. So I end up getting envelopes without any contents. Every time you say anything about it, it's "Oh, it must be the post office."

Whitehorn: Marilyn's right that people knew us as political prisoners by how we dealt with people and situations every day. I remember feeling

that the main impact I'd had was when I would intervene when a guard was picking on a woman, or help somebody get her privileges back when they'd been taken away unjustly. More than if I gave them a lecture on the history of something.

But Marilyn's also way too modest. When we were in prison together, all the other women knew she represented the politics of struggles for justice, human rights, liberation. Women would always approach her for help in understanding not only incidents on the news, world affairs, but also incidents of racism and hostility among different nationalities in the prison population. She may tire of talking about it, but I know for a fact she never tires of acting on all of it, treating people with respect, making peace in difficult situations, basically doing the right thing no matter how tired she is, how long she's had to do it.

One thing that changed while I was in prison is that there were many more women political prisoners. It was a shock to the prison system itself because they were terrified of us.

The government created a control unit. They tested it out on two of the Puerto Rican women, Lucy Rodríguez and Haydee Beltrán. Then they put Alejandrina Torres and Silvia Baraldini and Susan Rosenberg in an underground unit at the Federal Correctional Institution at Lexington. It was actually a basement unit and they were supposed to be there for the rest of their sentences, which were fifty-eight and forty-three and thirty-five years. It was a big mistake because it got international attention. It was one of the first times Amnesty International got involved in the conditions of incarceration in the United States. Part of it was that they were terrified we would revolutionize the rest of the prison population.⁵

A few years after that unit was closed down, I was in Lexington and working in the landscape crew, mowing grass, and my boss was a guard who had been assigned to that basement unit. She told me that they had been told not to speak to the prisoners there because they would brainwash them. I thought it was hysterical. I said, "You see after we've worked together, whether I brainwash you."

About three months later, that guard asked me, "Who's that guy who's the biggest mass murderer ever?" And I said, "George Bush [Sr.]" Then we got into a discussion about who is a mass murderer—someone who kills five people or a president who—?⁶ And she says, "You know, you're making a lot of sense, Whitehorn. Uh-oh. I *am* being brainwashed."

Day: Some people say that political prisoners get more recognition and support than social prisoners. What's your reaction to that?

Buck: There's a misconception that political prisoners always get so much support. There are some who were in prison for years before they

got any support at all, except for a few people they'd worked with in the world. We could look at [Nelson] Mandela. All these people worked to free Mandela. What was done about all the other [African National Congress] prisoners?⁷ Probably ninety-nine out of one hundred political prisoners didn't join the struggle to become famous.

Also political prisoners tend not to get parole. Particularly men political prisoners, they're in isolation for years and years. There's a lot of things we don't get that sometimes other prisoners do get.

Whitehorn: If you want to understand prisons, you have to understand both political and social prisoners. They're two sides of a program of repression. One is, you terrify communities and tell them the law is all-powerful and people will lose their freedom for many, many years if they transgress. The other is, you give huge sentences to anyone who says, "There are such egregious social injustices that we have to go up against the government." You lock those people up for long periods of time, and that will prevent the rise of a new generation of leaders or activists. If you leave out one side of that equation, you'll never understand what prisons are. You'll think they're just about making money, which is ridiculous.

Having said that, I think the current building of a mass movement about the prison industrial complex began with political prisoners. There is absolutely no division between supporting political prisoners and fighting for an end to the prison system. Angela Davis has been instrumental in it. Who's she? She's an ex-political prisoner. [See chapter 10, this volume.] The people who have organized a lot of young activists in that movement are political prisoners or ex-political prisoners.

Every single political prisoner did prison work before they went to prison. We were the people who supported the Attica brothers; we were the people who were in the Midnight Special Collective back in the early 1970s in New York, which was a prison support collective. We're not the ones who don't think social prisoners are important.

And political prisoners often need extra support. Marilyn Buck has an eighty-year sentence and she has *never* been accused of actually hurting a single person. Or Teddy Jah Heath, who just died in prison. He had been convicted of a kidnapping, where a big-time drug-dealer was put in a car, driven around, talked to, and let out. No injury; no nothing. Jah did twenty-seven years in prison. After twenty-five years, he went to the parole board and was rejected. Two years later, he died in prison of colon cancer. Because his act was a political act. It was done in line with the programs of the Black Liberation Army, growing out of the Black Panther Party, to stop the drug trade in the black communities.⁸

Day: Marilyn, what do you need from people on the outside?

Buck: What I need from people is what we all need: to seize our human liberation as much as possible as women, as lesbians, as heterosexuals. To support the right of human beings to have their own nations, their own liberation, and their own justice. If we stopped police brutality; if black women and men were treated like equal human beings, that would make me feel really, really good, because I would be less dehumanized as a white person in this society. I would not be objectified as the oppressor.

I would like us to be more creative; to be the artists that we all are. I don't want to see child prostitution. That to me is oppression in the concrete; people having to sell their children to stay alive. Or watching their children in the clutches of the police. Or a woman standing on her feet as a waitress for ten hours a day when her veins are breaking and still not be able to pay the rent and be there for her children.

I was thinking about this the other day—I think about the vision I had when I was a nineteen-year-old of justice and human rights and women's equality. It was a wonderful vision. I think how it got implemented—how we became rigid and rhetorical within that—took away from that vision. But without a vision, you can't go forward.

Day: Laura, now that you're out of prison, what do you want to do?

Whitehorn: I don't ever want to forget. That would be like putting caluses over my heart. It would be forgetting the people I owe something to.

I guess the hardest thing for me about getting out was leaving so many people behind. I've been working in release efforts. We filed papers for clemency with Clinton for all the federal political prisoners. I try to do work for HIV-positive prisoners through my job at *POZ* magazine. And when people ask me, "How can I support your friends who are left behind?" that makes me feel whole.

It's made me sad that I've tried to interest different groups of women in supporting young women in prison on these ridiculous [drug] conspiracy cases. The "girlfriend crimes," like Kemba Smith.⁹ There are hundreds of Kemba Smiths in the federal system. And I have been singularly unsuccessful in interesting any organized women's groups to fight for those women.

One thing that makes prisons so criminal is that they damage people over time. I'm very damaged, and I had tons of support. I did prison work for years before I was arrested, so I knew what to expect. Nothing could really catch me off guard. Yet I find I have places in me that I don't know how to go to, that are so filled with pain.

Especially late, in the middle of the night, when I think about some of my friends, these young women who are doing life sentences. They didn't kill anyone. They didn't hurt anybody. They gave a fucking message to someone, or maybe they didn't turn their husband in, and they knew he

had killed someone. They're doing life, and they have very little chance of getting out. There's a pain in me that I don't know how to deal with.

You know, it's very difficult to carry on relationships with people on the outside while you're in prison. Your friends shield you from things because either they think you don't want to hear about the great dinner they had the night before, or you're going to think their problems are trivial because, after all, they're not in prison. It damages your ability to have human relationships. And I have to say that the people I've seen who carry on friendships with prisoners are few and far between, and I honor them.

So I need to continue to struggle for prisoners and to win their release. And to say, it's extremely important for people on the outside to understand what prisons are and who's in prison and to visit them. To bring that kind of humanity into the prisons—but most of all, to bring those prisoners out, back into the communities.

Notes

This interview was conducted by Susie Day in 2001 and printed in the *Monthly Review*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (July-August 2001). The *Monthly Review* introduction to the interview stated: "While it was possible to talk to Laura at length about her time behind bars, Marilyn was able only to make four long-distance phone calls, each summarily cut off by the prison after fifteen minutes. After reading Marilyn's words—and having known and lived beside Marilyn for years in prison—Laura added to what Marilyn wasn't able to say, as well as expressing her own experience and recollections."

1. *Editor's note*: In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed into law the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act. Among other provisions, the act authorizes the government to deport immigrants based on secret evidence not disclosed to the immigrant or his attorney (known as "secret evidence laws"), and to impose criminal and immigration sanctions on those who provide humanitarian aid to any foreign organization labeled "terrorist" by the Secretary of State. See C. Stone Brown, "Legislating Repression: The Federal Crime Bill and the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act," in *Criminal Injustice: Confronting the Prison Crisis*, ed. Elihu Rosenblatt (Boston: South End Press, 1996).

2. *Editor's note*: In 1980, black Americans made up 46 percent of the U.S. prison population (and 12 percent of the national population), while Latinos made up 7 percent of the prison population (and 7 percent of the national population). In 2000, black Americans made up 47 percent of the prison population (and 12 percent of the national population) while Latinos made up 16 percent of the prison population (and 13 percent of the national population). While in 1980 the incarceration rate for blacks was 551 per 100,000, in 2000 it was 1,815 per 100,000. In 1980, the incarceration rate for Latinos was 139 per 100,000, and in 2000 it was

609 per 100,000. (Mother Jones, "Debt to Society," Special Report, available online at www.motherjones.com/prisons/index.html; statistics from Bureau of Justice Statistics, Criminal Justice Institute, U.S. Census Bureau.)

3. *Editor's note:* For general information about the imprisonment of women, see notes in the preface of this volume. For information about women of color and the criminal justice system, see Juanita Díaz-Cotto, *Gender, Ethnicity, and the State: Latina and Latino Prison Politics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996); Beth Richie, *Compelled to Crime: The Gender Entrapment of Battered Black Women* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Luana Ross, *Inventing the Savage: The Social Construction of Native American Criminality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998); Jael Silliman and Anannya Bhattacharjee, eds., *Policing the National Body: Sex, Race and Criminalization* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 2002).

4. *Editor's note:* For more information on the health care situation in Chowchilla Prison, see Joann Walker, "Medical Treatment at Chowchilla," in *Criminal Injustice: Confronting the Prison Crisis*, ed. Elihu Rosenblatt (Boston: South End Press, 1996).

5. *Editor's note:* In 1986, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons opened a High Security Unit (HSU) at the women's federal correctional institution in Lexington, Kentucky. In its less than two years of existence, this control unit, which never housed more than six prisoners, became a focus of national and international concern over human rights abuses inside U.S. prisons. Susan Rosenberg and Alejandrina Torres, a Puerto Rican *Independentista*, were the first two women in the federal prison system to be transferred to the control unit. A short time after the HSU opened, a third political prisoner, Silvia Baraldini, an Italian national anti-imperialist convicted in the 1979 escape of Assata Shakur, was transferred to the unit. None of these women were transferred to the HSU as a result of disciplinary infractions. Rather, the Bureau of Prisons stated as its official criteria, "[a] prisoner's past or present affiliation, association, or membership in an organization which . . . attempts to disrupt or overthrow the government of the U.S."

Once sent to the HSU, prisoners were told they could not return to the normal prison population until they renounced their political affiliations and beliefs. The HSU was located in the basement of the Lexington prison, and its inhabitants were completely isolated from the other prisoners. There was no natural light, no fresh air, no educational or recreational opportunities. Prisoners held within the HSU lived under constant surveillance. They were permitted no privacy, only infrequent, no-contact family visits, and two ten-minute, monitored phone calls each week. Subject to sleep deprivation and arbitrary rule changes, they were exposed to sexual harassment and overt hostility by the mostly male staff. As a result of these extreme conditions, the women began to experience both psychological and physical effects, including vision problems, insomnia, exhaustion, weight-loss, and depression. The use of small-group isolation as employed in the HSU has been condemned as torture by Amnesty International and the United Nations. Following opposition from human rights groups and the Puerto Rican independence movement, the HSU was officially shut down in August 1988. But, the following

year, the U.S. Court of Appeals overturned the court decision (*Baraldini v. Thornburgh*) that declared the HSU's political criteria for placement of prisoners unconstitutional. Moreover, in August 1988, the women from the Lexington HSU were simply transferred to the newly opened Shawnee Unit, a control unit with the same mission as the HSU, at the Federal Correctional Institution in Marianna, Florida. For more information, see Mary K. O'Melveny, "Lexington Prison High Security Unit: U.S. Political Prison"; Laura Whitehorn, "Resistance at Lexington"; and Silvia Baraldini, Marilyn Buck, Susan Rosenberg, et al., "Women's Control Unit," in *Criminal Injustice: Confronting the Prison Crisis*.

6. *Editor's note*: Whitehorn most likely refers to the domestic and foreign policies of the U.S. under George Herbert Walker Bush's presidency. Under that Bush administration, the U.S. government bombed and invaded Panama in 1989, bombed and invaded Iraq in 1990–91, and implemented an embargo on Iraq. That embargo led to severe malnutrition, disease, and hundreds of thousands of deaths among Iraqi women and children. See Noam Chomsky, *Culture of Terrorism* (Boston: South End Press, 1988).

7. *Editor's note*: First organized in 1912, the African National Congress (ANC) led resistance against South Africa's apartheid regime. In 1960, after decades of nonviolent protesting, and in response to increased police violence and government repression, the ANC concluded that it must meet government violence with armed resistance. It formed an armed faction. In the ensuing government retaliation, many ANC leaders, including Nelson Mandela, were imprisoned; yet the ANC continued to grow and attract support among the South African people and build international opposition to apartheid. As the ANC grew stronger, police repression intensified. The South African government was forced to the negotiating table. In 1990, Mandela was freed. He was elected President of South Africa in 1994.

8. *Editor's note*: For more information on the Black Liberation Army, see Evelyn Williams, *Inadmissible Evidence: The Story of the African American Trial Lawyer Who Defended the Black Liberation Army* (Brooklyn: Lawrence Hill, 1993); Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1987).

9. *Editor's note*: In 1993, at age twenty-four, Kemba Smith, a young African American woman, was convicted of conspiracy and drug trafficking, and sentenced to twenty-four years. She never actually used or sold any drugs, but was prosecuted for failing to cooperate with police who were pursuing her abusive boyfriend for his drug-dealing activities. She was pardoned by President Bill Clinton in 2000, following a national campaign on her behalf.