

# DEATH BY REGULATION

## & a message from a death camp

two essays  
by Russell  
Maroon  
Shoatz



on "clean torture"  
in u.s. prisons

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**Russell Maroon Shoatz**  
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Russell "Maroon" Shoatz is a New Afrikan Prisoner of War at SCI Greene in Waynesburg, Pennsylvania. Originally imprisoned in January 1972, he has spent over 25 years in captivity. Over 17 of those years were spent in various control units, locked down 22 to 24 hours daily. Russell was born in Philadelphia in August of 1943. He went to school, married and raised a family there. In 1967 he helped found the "Black Unity Council" which merged with the Black Panther Party in 1969. He was imprisoned in 1972 in connection with the retaliatory shooting of two police officers in Philadelphia.

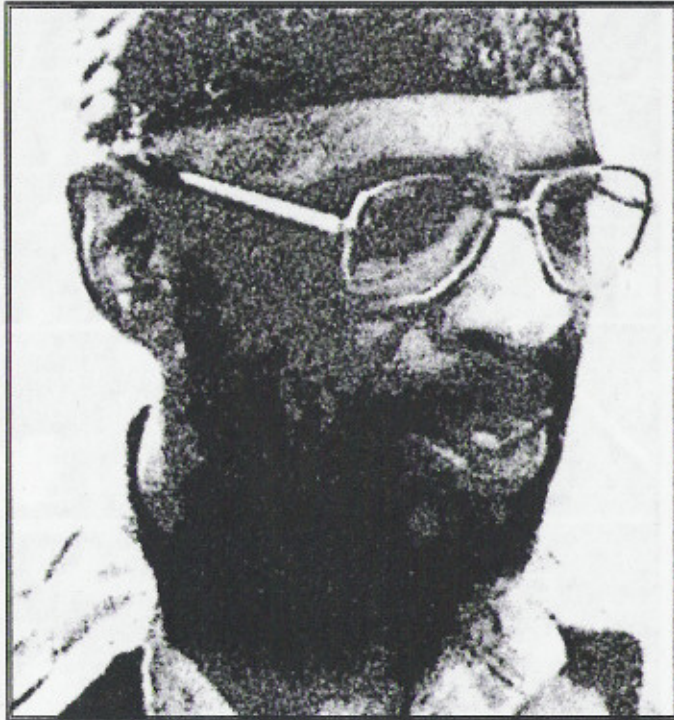
Russell was able to liberate himself from prison on two occasions and was only recaptured after massive "slave hunts." These two brief glimpses of freedom earned him the name "Maroon," which was the name originally given to Jamaican slaves who escaped and fought their ex-masters for freedom.

Since that time he has spent all but two years in control units. Presently serving multiple life sentences, he has been told that he will never leave the control unit. Despite this, he declares that he remains a "committed freedom fighter and will not ever rest or disavow my political and ethical convictions as long as I breathe air."

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## **Death by Regulation: Pennsylvania Control Unit Abuses**

A control unit is a special section within a prison that is designed to house prisoners whom administrators have determined should be locked-up for 23 hours a day, for an indefinite period. Other names for this type of facility include: "Restricted Housing Unit" (RHU), "Secure Management Facility" (SMU), "Super Max," "Maxi-Maxi Prison," and "ADX."

### **Pennsylvania Gets a Control Unit Facility:**

In 1994 the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) opened its flagship "Control Unit" at its brand new State Correctional Institute at Greene (S.C.I.G.), located near Waynesburg, Pennsylvania. Until that time the PA DOC had a number of mini control units scattered throughout other prisons in the state. Many of these are still in operation, but S.C.I.G. is officially their premier institution for the implementation of control units.

Control units differ from all other forms of restrictions within a prison (the "hole," solitary confinement, etc.) because of their "indefinite" nature. These other prison restriction methods are governed by clearly defined rules which dictate how long a prisoner will be subjected to the confinement and what a prisoner can and should do to have it removed. In control unit facilities, however, prisoners can be kept in confinement for the duration of their sentence or until death.

### **Alcatraz: A Brave New World of Torture Is Born:**

Between 1933 and 1963 the federal government operated the most notorious control unit in U.S. history: Alcatraz or "the rock" as it was known. Alcatraz, which sits on an island in the San Francisco Bay, was used to house what were termed "incurable" prisoners. Daily life at this control unit was so severe that being sentenced there was known as "death by regulation"; Prisoners could be kept on "the rock" indefinitely. During its existence, Alcatraz was the site of some of the nation's most violent uprisings. It has since been exposed as a place of both official and unofficial torture and human depravity on the part of prisoners and officials.

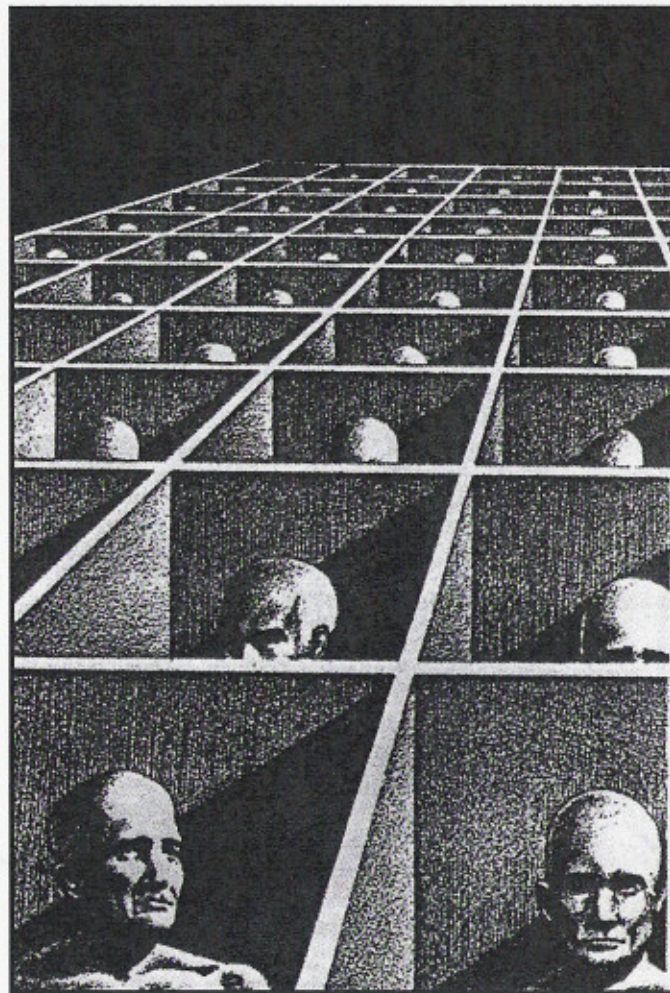
Officially, the idea behind Alcatraz was that if all "incurable" prisoners were lumped together in one place, both the prison system



and society would benefit. Unofficially, however, the facility was designed to make life so brutal that most of its inhabitants would suffer a complete breakdown and therefore be pacified. Alcatraz proved to be a dismal failure in both regards. Instead of breaking down the will of the prisoners (unofficially of course) the harsh regime only embittered them. It thus engendered within them a fierce determination to survive and take vengeance against their real and perceived enemies. By separating out "incurables" from other prisoners, the penal system may have benefited. However the communities to which the inhabitants of Alcatraz were released did not. Prisoners who did time in Alcatraz were, in large part, far more dangerous after they left.

### Scientists Make Advances in the Field of Human Rights Abuses:

The "technicians" who helped engineer and operate this diabolical new methodology began their work roughly around 1962. They were influenced and inspired by new advances in the field of "behavior therapy" and sought to introduce aspects of this field into the penal system. Impressed with the argument that foreigners (the Chinese, Russians and North Koreans) had used these new methods of control on American prisoners of war during the Korean conflict, the technicians reasoned that if such techniques could work on trained and hardened soldiers, then surely they would work on criminals! Also exciting to the technicians was the possibility that these methods could seemingly be implemented without obvious signs of physical abuse, as the methodology did not rely on bodily force or a "dungeon" style environment to impart its effects. Rather, it centered on the manipulation of the mind. The objective was to cause the prisoner to suffer a mental breakdown rather than trying to "break the prisoner down" physically. It was believed that this could be accomplished while still adhering to the "evolving standards of decency" that federal courts had mandated the prisons implement, particularly in response to the struggles of prisoners and community awareness of such struggles.





However, most others here are trapped in the twilight zone, between a life-and-death torture of nothingness that kills one's spirit and soul. The prisoners have 23 hours, which they can, in theory, use to read, study and develop themselves, yet it is not allowed. Not unless you can learn those things from a Readers Digest or the other mindless books in the prison library. If you order or have books sent to you they are stored away until you're released from the control unit. When your relatives come to visit you, you are separated from them by bulletproof glass, and you sit handcuffed to a waist belt for one hour.

When one cannot take this grind and refuses to follow one of the ever changing set of petty rules, he will either be given more time to do in the control unit or beaten by the guards. That is in addition to the "initiation beating" that most prisoners get as soon as they step in the door. Recently, a prisoner named Henry Washington was beaten and had a guard's nightstick shoved up his rectum. New York is not the only place that this brutality happens!

Our enemies are making very bitter men out of most of these prisoners. Many of them will be "monsters" when they eventually return to your communities, and most will be returning! But I can read your minds; a lot of you are preparing yourself to accept our enemy's next trick: If many of these men were bad actors before going to prison, and the prison overseers are making them worse, then the "rational" solution is to keep them there forever. (Death by regulation. See how easy it is to fall for their tricks once you're conditioned?)

But what about the prison employees who do return to their communities every evening?! Surely, you can see that if an individual torments even a wild animal and makes it attack, that individual is as responsible as the animal, if not more so, and probably more dangerous!

It is true that most of the prisoners who come in here need help in reforming their character and behavior, but they are not getting any help in doing that at S.C.I.G. If you don't do something to help these men when they get out... you ain't got nothin' comin'!!!

## Sensory Deprivation 101:

The brain and nervous system, or "The Mind," cannot function normally without stimulation. Neither can it function normally when given too much stimulation. The brain and nervous system must be maintained in a "steady state" (Benjamin, T.B. & Kenneth Lax. *Solitary Confinement as Psychological Punishment*).

The primary tools used in this new method of mind control and torture were "sensory and perceptual isolation." The new style control units were clean, well lighted and outwardly "clinical" and appeared comfortable. Prisoners were fed a well-balanced diet and the typical prison regimen of physical punishment was not introduced.

[However]... the evidence appears overwhelming that solitary confinement alone, even in the absence of physical brutality or unhygienic conditions can produce emotional damage, declines in mental functioning and even the most extreme forms of psychopathology such as depersonalization, hallucination and delusions (Benjamin & Lax).

Control unit facilities are designed to be devoid of adequate levels of external stimulation. There is very little, if any, activity that provides educational instruction, shop training, physical exercise or contact with the outside world.

## "Life" at State Correctional Institute-Greene:

At S.C.I.G. the control unit facility is completely separated from the rest of the prison by 18-foot walls. Each building is compartmentalized into 4 "pods" of 24 cells each. Each pod functions independently of the others. Within each 12 x 6 cell there is a steel bed, steel eating surface, stool, steel toilet, sink, mirror, and bedding. All meals are taken in the cell. A prisoner is only allowed out of his cell for 5 hours of outdoor exercise per week and allowed 3 ten minute showers. The exercise is taken alone, in a razor wire topped fence and no exercise equipment is ever provided.

Each prisoner is issued a jumpsuit, tennis shoes, and work shoes for winter, two pair of socks, two t-shirts, two pair of underwear, two sheets, a mattress, one blanket, one pillow, one towel, and one washcloth. Soap, shaving gear, toothpaste, toothbrushes, combs and toilet paper are issued periodically. Beside the daily meals, these are the only items that a control unit prisoner has continual contact with. Furthermore, these articles are strictly regulated and it is forbidden to possess an extra ration



of any item. Each article is exchanged on a one-for-one basis. With the exception of a ration of fruit, no food can be saved.

The control unit is governed by the Department of Corrections Administrative Directive 802 (DC-ADM 802). It reads (in part) as follows:

A. Administrative Custody is a status of confinement for maximum custody level of inmates which provides the highest level of security and control. Inmates confined in this status shall not have the privileges accorded to inmates in lower security levels. The following conditions apply:

1. Smoking will be limited to 2 packs of cigarettes or their equivalent per week.
2. There will be no radios, televisions, telephone calls (exception: emergency or legal), personal property or commissary except writing materials.
3. Non-legal visits of one per week (one hour) will be allowed. They will be allowed legal material that may be contained in one Records Center box...
4. They will be allowed incoming mail... However no books other than legal materials and a personal Bible, Holy Koran or other religious equivalent will be permitted.. Leisure reading material (2 books per week) may be requested on a weekly basis from the library.

B. PRC (Program Review Committee) or Security Level 5 Unit Teams may add to the above *privileges* (emphasis is mine) based on an individual need, on safety and security, and on behavioral *progress* (emphasis is mine) of the inmate.

As if this "Spartan" environment was not severe enough, control unit prisoners are forbidden to hold conversations with other prisoners in other cells as it is considered "loud talking." Given conditions at control unit facilities and their "indefinite" nature, one can easily see that they are far from country clubs or even warehouses. There are men in S.C.I.G. who have 17, 23, even 26 years in control units with no prospects of ever being released!

The men in this prison are serving the full range of sentences and many of them will be released back into your communities someday, perhaps soon. Yet even they are under a sentence of death. That is, they're under a sentence of "spiritual death."

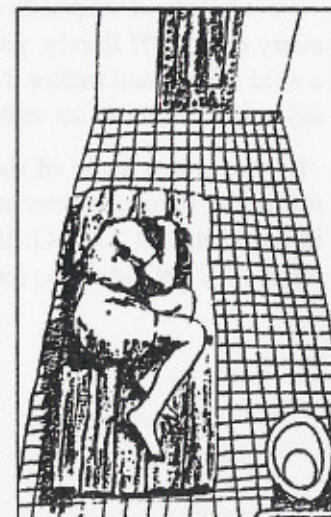
It is the mission of the prison overseers to break the spirits of these men. The point is not to break them of their bad habits and help them reform. No, the only objective here is to terrorize these prisoners so that they will carry the message throughout the prisons in this state, "If you're sent to Greene County, you ain't got nothing coming!"

That's what prisoners tell other prisoners.

Now, I know that most of you are thinking that this sounds like a good "tough love" approach. That's because you're blinded by the smoke again. This prison has what is called a "control unit;" the enemy calls it the "restricted housing unit." It's the largest control unit in the state, with a capacity of 772 although there are about 386 here at present. This is where the breaking takes place. This is also where the court-ordered death sentences take place. I've been in this Control Unit for close to seven years and I was told that I would never be released.

A young prisoner who used to be a couple of cells away from me would get up every morning singing this song: "this must be hell, well, well, well" and would continue in this manner throughout the day. That's because in his bathroom sized cell he had nothing to occupy his twenty-three hour days but two Reader's Digests that he was allowed to order from the library once a week. He was further allowed to exercise in a "dog cage" for an hour, five days per week, and allowed to take three, five-minute showers. The rest of the time was spent in that cell. Outside of three plain meals, that is the daily, weekly, monthly and yearly routine for the majority of the men in the control unit.

Most of the men sentenced to death by the courts are qualified to watch TV or listen to radios. But, of course, if our enemies have their way, this will only be "temporary." It is a good way to keep them from thinking about their fate and, for some, from working to beat the hangman.





There is virtually no end to the examples of this “real war” if we only just look! But we are bombarded by the enemy so often that most of us have become shell-shocked. For all too many of us it’s just a matter of survival on a day-to-day basis. Even if our enemy just sets off a “firecracker” we dive in our bunkers and wait until the “shelling” is over.

I cannot think of a better way to seal our own fate. Those of us who recognize that our enemy is trying to destroy our spirit of resistance, our spirit of life, and most of all our human soul, realize that we must resist, we must get others to resist and we must destroy this culture of death.

I’m writing these words from a prison. Don’t get bent out of shape about that because I’m actually freer than many of you. I am no less community minded, moral or ethical. You see, everyone in prison ain’t a “bad guy” In fact, you can be put in prison for refusing to be a bad guy! That is, refusing to go along with the real bad guys: the greedy billionaires, lying politicians, and visionless social workers.

I have a warning that I need to relay to you: I have to let you know that you have to get up out of your bunkers and do something about it before it gets and worse. I’m being housed in a “death camp.” I mean that literally. It’s going to be hard for most of you take that seriously enough, because of who I am, and where I’m at and the fact that our enemy has laid down so much smoke about crime and prisons that most of you are blinded.

Our enemy calls this place “State Correctional Institution at Greene” or “SCI Greene” for short. It’s located in Greene County of Waynesburg, PA. That’s so far from Philly that if you ride past it you end up in Morgantown, West Virginia before you can find a new station on your car radio. I say that S.C.I.G. stands for “State Concentration and Internment Ground”. That’s because there is nothing resembling “correction” that goes on for most of these prisoners. Like the Nazi concentration camps, this is a death camp for sure!

Our Brother Mumia Abu Jamal and over one hundred other men, who our enemy plans to kill, are locked up here as well. I am not under a court sentence of death. I have, however, been sentenced to “death by regulation.” Our enemy calls it a “natural life” sentence. I’ve spent over twenty-five years in that state.

If prison personnel severed the nerve cells in prisoners’ hands, we would well recognize that they were intentionally destroying prisoners’ ability to function and feel normally. Such a conclusion would be obvious. Although their methods of control are based psychological torture rather than physical abuse and the side effects of this torture are somewhat less apparent to the average observer; control unit facilities are equally cruel and barbaric if not more so. (Paraphrased from Benjamin & Lux).

### **United States Violates UN Declaration on Human Rights and Own Constitution:**

Again: S.C.I.G.’s control unit is being operated in violation of the United Nations’ accepted standards, the United States Constitution, state law, Department of Education and Welfare policies on human experiments and the “evolving standards of decency” in our society.

After witnessing the results of solitary confinement, we believe that it is criminality at one of its highest levels. We are drawn to this conclusion when we ponder.

The international covenant on civil and political rights, “The Covenant,” is in accord with and expands upon the rights which have been established by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The United States and all of its federal and state agencies are bound by this declaration since its adoption by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948. The United States ratified it in June of 1992. The Covenant states in part: “No one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment.” Article 7 of the UDHR imposes an affirmative duty on each state and country government to afford protection against the acts prohibited under it “...whether inflicted by people acting in their official capacity, outside their official capacity, or in private capacity.” (International Human Rights Instruments, HRI/GEN/1, 4 September 1992, General Comment 20, Article 7. 44th Session, 1992: No. 1)

Our government, its agencies, the media and general public recoil in horror upon hearing of atrocities committed by foreign powers such as the former Soviet Bloc, China, as well as various countries in Asia, Africa and South America. The same concern and outrage should be directed to the US government which sanctions the same sorts of torture — torture paid by tax dollars. Our taxes help support policies of “social suicide” by returning former control unit prisoners — whose time in



such facilities has only worsened their emotional and mental condition — to their communities. (Remember Alcatraz?!)

Of course such “vampirish” prison policies do exist in full view of the public. Several years ago the federal government was forced to close a control unit facility for women in Lexington, KY after various organizations, concerned individuals and relatives made conditions there known to a broader section of the public. Other control unit facilities would surely meet the same fate were they subject to the same level of public scrutiny. Such “treatment” has been universally condemned: Article 10 of the Covenant prohibits convicted prisoners from being subjected to any hardship or constraint other than that resulting from the deprivation of liberty... The Human Rights Committee has commented that treating prisoners with respect for their human dignity “is a fundamental and universal applicable rule (National Prison Project Journal, October 1993).”

Control unit facilities cannot be allowed to exist. They serve no other purpose than to dehumanize their occupants. Our collective welfare demands that we do everything within our power to bring about and end to this form of imprisonment and torture.



## Message From a Death Camp

There is a war going on in America.

Normally we can't see it because the enemy has laid down a heavy screen of smoke that they use to maneuver behind. The enemy has become so skilled at these maneuvers that, at times, they even tell us about this war; yet even then their deception is working to put us to sleep — all the better to attack us. The enemy calls it a “war on poverty,” a “war on crime,” “the war on drugs” or a “war on childhood disease,” and tomorrow they will make up another deceptive title to maneuver behind. Hide they must, because our enemies fear the day that we wake up to the fact that, hidden in all of this rhetoric, is an impoverished spirit which is alienated from life, fearful of difference, greedy and confused.

We are involved in a “cultural war” which has many fronts: political, economic, social, moral and ethical. However it's the ideas, behavior and institutions of America, in their many forms, that are being fought over. If one does not recognize this fact, then your soul will be stolen by our enemy and used to fuel their machine. They are death dealers and death merchants; they destroy anyone who threatens to slow down or expose their mindless accumulation of wealth, power and control. It makes no difference whether you are the innocent, the young, or the elderly; if you cannot add to their accumulation of power, they will grind you to dust! More still, they will vilify mock and otherwise distort who you are, all the better to get everyone on their side.

They will use their monster media apparatus, their agencies of government, soldiers in police uniforms, judges and prisons to help do the dirty deed. They will even use you against yourself, or some other “target,” if you're not constantly vigilant, watching for their maneuvers and tricks.

They are always maneuvering under the cover of a catchy slogan like: “welfare to workfare,” which really means “take them off our dole and put them in a hole.” We were warned that the so-called “war on drugs” was really a nickname for a stepped up war on Black youth. The tens of thousands of young Blacks in the Federal and State Prisons show that was all too true!