

Support Those Who Rattle Cages

Marius Mason

2024

a review of

Rattling the Cages: Oral Histories of North American Political Prisoners, Editors: Eric King and Josh Davidson; forward by Angela Davis. AK Press, 2023

“I was told that I would be dead by the time I finished my sentence.”

—Oscar Lopez Rivera, sentenced to 55 years for 130 FALN bomb attacks in 1974–1983

This is an extraordinary compilation of stories from so many U.S. political prisoners. Those interviewed describe the movements they came from and through their eyes we can see parts of our shared radical history. This book brings a message of unconquerable resistance and that despite incarceration, the work of making a new world in the shell of the old continues to be done, defying the confinement and deprivations of the carceral system.

As someone who has seen the inside of several prisons for the past 16 years, and lived in both male and female prisons as a trans man, it was interesting to see how conditions change over time and exist in different places. Sadly, comments from hacktivist Jeremy Hammond, sentenced to ten years for releasing intelligence data to Wikileaks, on the increasing bans on books and requirement for the digitization and copying of prisoner mail, are correct.

An increasing number of prisons are putting draconian measures into effect to limit reading material and personal contact which will have a negative effect on the type of support prisoners can receive such as Books to Prisoners groups. This has had direct impact on those incarcerated at the federal institution where I am.

Before being sentenced to almost 22 years in prison for environmental sabotage, I worked with Books to Prisoners in three cities, formed important ties, and now as a prisoner reaching out to my community, miss the connection.

Books, letters, and news from the outside are vital in making the difference between dying in prison (literally or socially) and remaining alive, informed, and inspired. Lopez Rivera’s comments on the potential threat of disappearing into a dungeon are poignant.

What I appreciated most about the book was the opportunity to hear the individual voices of so many of my heroes of the movement, their own idiom, their own perspectives. The book gives the stories of prisoners with a wide range of political and social ideas, from the anarchist to the communist, from the non-believer to the religious, from the anti-authoritarian to the authoritarian. It was emotional for me to imagine their presence was made manifest in the free world, for their message to ring out and carry far.

The words of co-editor, Eric King, just released after ten years of imprisonment for actions in solidarity with the 2014 Ferguson uprising, frame why this book is so necessary for reading and sharing. “We cannot turn our backs on these people with apathy or indifference. We need to love them the way they loved the world enough to fight for it.”

Before his release late last year, King assisted in the editing of the dozens of interviews from the political prisoners whose writing fill this volume. Co-editor, Josh Davidson, a member of the Certain Days Calendar Collective, recorded the interviews.

Those whose words fill the pages make a long list of political prisoners, prisoners of war, some who may be familiar and some not, but each is worth an investigation of why they are behind bars.

I was honored to be among those interviewed whose sentences added together have spent hundreds of years imprisoned enduring the horror of the American prison system. The others include Donna Willmott, James Kilgore, Mark Cook, Rebecca Rubin, Hanif Shabazz Bey, Chelsea Manning, Oso Blanco, Ann Hansen, Sean Swain, Martha Hennessy, Jalil Muntaqim, Jeremy Hammond, Kojo Bomani Sababu, Laura Whitehorn, Eric King, Rattler, Ray Luc Levasseur, Elizabeth McAlister, Malik Smith, David Campbell, Xinachtli, David Gilbert, Susan Rosenberg, Daniel McGowan, Linda Evans, Herman Bell, Jennifer Rose, Ed Mead, Jerry Koch, Michael Kimble, Bill Harris, Jaan Laaman, Jake Conroy, Bill Dunne, and Oscar Lopez Rivera.

Besides the information and inspiration you gain from reading these personal accounts of motivation, dreams, and vision, purchase of the book provides solidarity for those incarcerated. Sales of the book benefit the Anarchist Black Cross Warchest program.

Marius Mason is a transgender anarchist, environmentalist, and animal rights prisoner. **supportmariusmason.org**.



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