

# UNLOCK THE BOX

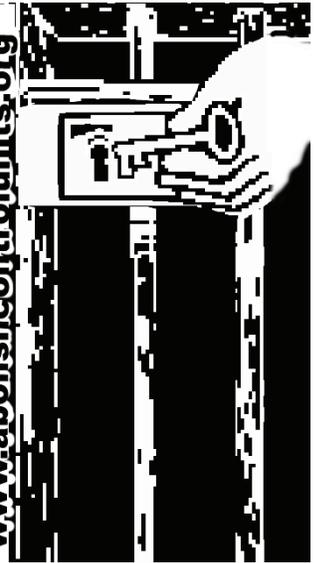
the Movie

**Stop Torture in U.S. Prisons!**

[... DVD in fall 2008]

[www.AbolishControlUnits.org](http://www.AbolishControlUnits.org)  
[www.PrisonCensorship.info](http://www.PrisonCensorship.info)

[www.abolishcontrolunits.org](http://www.abolishcontrolunits.org)



Unlock the Box is a movie documenting the struggle to put an end to long-term isolation in u.s. prisons that has been waged by prisoners and activists for decades. Starting from the premise that long-term isolation is a form of torture that serves no purpose except the state's nefarious aims at social control, Unlock the Box documents the many forms of struggle that this movement has taken over the years. It also features new research on the growth and extent of the use of long-term isolation in the united States. Throughout the movie there is a focus on lessons from struggle and analysis of the relationship between the prison movement and the global effort to put an end to imperialism in all its forms. The desired purpose of the movie is to continue to bring the issues of the torture going on in these prisons to a broader audience and to help create greater clarity of what needs to be done to replace a system of torture with a system that works in the interests of humynity.

## Why Control Units?

It is important to recognize that we cannot pick our battles frivolously. There are uncountable horrible injustices in the world that need to be resolved. So figuring out where to start in order to be effective in eliminating all injustice is a crucial step for us. The 'principal contradiction' is the term we apply to the struggle of opposing forces that once resolved will do the most to push forward all struggles in our society.

Through practice, and the summing up of that practice into theory, we have come to see that in the United States, the lumpen of the oppressed nations are one of the greatest allies of the world's oppressed. In particular, the incarcerated lumpen are at the vanguard in dealing with the problem of imperialism due to their facing its repression on a daily basis.

As the lumpen struggle advanced, both on the streets and behind bars, the state responded with more prisons, more police and the creation of the "Supermax." Therefore, control units are a direct attempt to repress the efforts of those who are organizing for real social change. As such, organizing broad opposition to these torture units is integral to maintaining our ability to build a just world. It is also a high priority both in keeping our leaders in contact with the people and educating the people about the true nature of the system.

*continued on back...*

## How to get Unlock the Box

Unlock the Box will be out on DVD by fall of 2008. To get a copy you need to pre-order. You can pre-order a copy at the StopMax Conference. Or check out [www.abolishcontrolunits.org](http://www.abolishcontrolunits.org) for information on how to pre-order later.

Our first priority is getting the movie out to people, so pre-order prices are very negotiable. Those who pay will get first priority, then we hope to send free copies to as many people/groups as we can. The important thing is to get your order in before we mail them out because we do not currently have traditional distribution means. If you are interested in distributing Unlock the Box, please let us know.



feedback and contributions can be sent to: [unlockthebox@nym.hush.com](mailto:unlockthebox@nym.hush.com)  
more info on the movie will be available at: [www.abolishcontrolunits.org](http://www.abolishcontrolunits.org)

The era of decolonization following WWII demonstrated clearly that the principal contradiction in the world had become that between the oppressed and oppressor nations. Mao Zedong's old adage that "In wars of national liberation patriotism is applied internationalism" still rings true today. Especially in a world where imperialism is the dominant force in more and more corners of the globe. This has been manifested in the recent internationalization of the US injustice system. While the United States has ran prisons and systematically tortured people throughout its neo-colonies for decades, this has usually been CIA and other secretive operations. With the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as with the whole so-called War on Terror in general, we have seen Amerikan soldiers of the occupying forces being the jailkeepers and interrogators.

Every victory we have in ending torture and reducing oppression in prisons in the United States makes it harder for them to do the same things around the world. Similarly, the growing resistance and power of the Third World struggles create more opportunities for us to bring attention to and create opposition to what is going on here. Our struggles continue to reinforce each other. And as more struggles break out on more fronts, imperialism weakens and all of our battles become that much easier.

## Defining Control Units

Amnesty International has defined solitary confinement as "all forms of incarceration that totally remove a prisoner from inmate society", elucidating further that "the prisoner is visually and acoustically isolated from all other prisoners as well as having no personal contact with them." But even this definition can forfeit the consideration of other variations of confinement that similarly and adversely affect the prisoners who are imprisoned in them. Professors Craig Haney and Mona Lynch concluded and supported with irrefutable evidence from the study they conducted that solitary confinement refers to a broad set of conditions, including single-celled control units where even some semblance of communication between prisoners is somehow feasible, double-celled control units that produce conditions of both isolation and overcrowding simultaneously, control units where prisoners are subjected to sensory overload as well as sensory deprivation, and control units that impose "small group isolation." The effects of solitary confinement in all of its manifestations within this country's prison system have been recognized by numerous authoritative analysts, as well as their impact upon society as a whole. Studies of this phenomenon, empirical and with scientific experimentation, have been conducted and recorded as early as 1790.

With this in mind, terms such as "punitive segregation", "restrictive housing", "segregated housing", "special housing", "administrative segregation", "disciplinary confinement" and "control units" have all been used to designate constructed environments that employ what are essentially conditions- whether in part or whole - of solitary confinement. Despite their differences, all of them serve similar ends in that all of them employ torturous conditions as punishment rather than rehabilitation.

*excerpt from the article*  
*"Understanding Solitary Confinement"*  
<http://www.prisoncensorship.info/news/all/NY/161/>

| Population | Year | Source                            |
|------------|------|-----------------------------------|
| 20,000     | 1998 | Roy D. King                       |
| 27,343     | 2000 | U.S. Census                       |
| 25,757     | 2003 | American Correctional Association |
| 25,000     | 2004 | Daniel P. Mears                   |
| 90,000+    | 2008 | our own research                  |

## Unlock the Box Research Project

One of the things that came out of the Unlock the Box conference in 2005 was the need to expand the exchange of information between prisoners and their supporters in both directions. The newsletter, "Under Lock & Key" is an example of providing a voice for prisoners and a forum for prisoners and activists on the outside to share information, campaign ideas and strategies. Participating organizations' extensive network of contacts in prisons is also a great resource for answering a lot of the questions people have about what is really going on.

One of the research projects initiated from this and featured in the movie is the tallying of control units throughout the united states, how many people are held in them, who is in them, and how they are expanding. Most of the statistics to date are around 20 to 25,000 people in Supermax prisons. Recent articles are still stating the 20,000 number published in 1998. The year 2000 U.S. census data shows over 25,000 prisoners in just 25 "Supermax" prisons in 18 states. This is based on prisons that are self-described as "Supermax" and supermax only. This list does not include any prisons in New York State, in which we have documented 44 different prisons with Special Housing Units (SHU) or S-Block, almost all of which were built in the 1990s.

In our preliminary survey of public records, and individuals with regional knowledge on control units, we have come up with a list of prisons with an estimated population in long-term isolation of 90,000+. But there are still gaps in our data. We still need numbers for some prisons and even whole states. Some prisons on our list are not of confirmed status. We welcome your input on completing this data, which will be available online starting this summer (2008) at [www.abolishcontrolunits.org](http://www.abolishcontrolunits.org) where it will continue to be updated.