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### Race and the Politics of Isolation in U.S. Prisons

Bonnie Kerness<sup>a</sup> & Jamie Bissonette Lewey<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Prison Watch Project, American Friends Service Committee, Newark, New Jersey, New England Region

<sup>b</sup> The Healing Justice Program, American Friends Service Committee, New England

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# Race and the Politics of Isolation in U.S. Prisons

Bonnie Kerness

*Director, Prison Watch Project*

*American Friends Service Committee, Newark, New Jersey, New England Region*

Jamie Bissonette Lewey

*Director, The Healing Justice Program*

*American Friends Service Committee, New England*

This article traces the historic development of isolation in the United States and its strategic use against poor and oppressed people of color as well as individuals who are seen as political threats. The article is based on documentary evidence from more than 30 years of interviews and letters from currently and formerly incarcerated people, as well as additional research compiled by the authors for the American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker peace and human rights organization. The article traces the use of solitary confinement from the 18th century to the present day and describes its use against Native peoples, newly emancipated African Americans, members of domestic liberation/self determination movements, the mentally ill, the addicted, and today, against anyone even remotely considered a security threat. In arguing for the abolition of these practices, the article notes the rise of “control unit” prisons that subject prisoners to isolation for months and years on end, explaining the profoundly destructive impact of these widespread practices on human health and on Black and Brown communities in particular.

## INTRODUCTION

Despite the ever-changing rhetoric around rehabilitation, prisons are uniquely and unequivocally about punishment, and their existence and purpose are undeniably political. This article examines the development of one particular penal practice: isolation. We trace the development of isolation, or “no-touch torture,” in the United States. Our focus is the use of isolation as a political tool to control those seen as political threats and how this practice is broadly implemented as a prison management tool to control minorities, the poor and oppressed, the addicted, and the mentally ill, who increasingly comprise the bulk of the prison population.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Bonnie Kerness, MSW, AFSC, 89 Market Street, Newark, NJ 07102, e-mail: bkerness@afsc.org or Jamie Bissonette Lewey, DD, American Friends Service Committee, 2161 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02140, e-mail: jbissonette@afsc.org

This article traces the history of the practice of isolation in the United States. It is based on documentary evidence from more than 30 years of interviews and letters from currently and formerly incarcerated people as well as other research compiled by the authors while employed by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). The AFSC interest in prison issues stems from Quaker (Religious Society of Friends) activism in prison reform, sparked in the 17th and 18th centuries when Friends were imprisoned for their beliefs and actions. This article references some of those reform efforts. In the current era, the AFSC takes a critical eye to prison policy while moving the public discourse about incarceration into a human rights framework.

All crime takes an incalculable toll on the communities where the most harm is done—even “victimless” crimes like addiction. This is evidenced in factors including high unemployment, homelessness, and children brought up by grandparents or removed to foster care. If we look a bit more broadly, we see the human despair of a community where more than 90% of the children qualify for school lunches and a similar number report having witnessed violence (Child Witness to Violence Project, 2013). We are equally convinced that the increasing deprivation within prisons is a significant contributor to the despair of these communities, when the incarceration rate of young Black men is at least one out of every three nationally (Carson & Golinelli, 2013) and, when in some communities, 80% of the men will spend some time in prison between their 18th and 30th birthdays.

This conversation is timely because the United Nations, along with other respected U.S. nongovernmental organizations such as Amnesty International and the National Religious Campaign to End Torture, have recognized that what happens in U.S. isolation units in prison is torture. At the same time, we know that public sentiment on torture is increasingly positive. At this time, between 49% and 52% of Americans feel that “torture was often or sometimes justifiable to gain key information” (Swanson, 2012, p. 27). The Chicago Council on Global Affairs found that public support for torture increased in the United States from 27% in 2004 to 42% in 2010. AP-GFK polling found U.S. public support for torture at 38% in 2005, increasing to 52% by 2009 (Swanson, 2012). In the case of isolation units in prisons—when the people who are experiencing “no touch torture” are already rejected by their communities; when a sentiment that “they committed the crime, they deserve what they get” prevails, when torture and the prisoner are invisible, when it is psychological, when it leaves no visible marks—it is far easier to countenance, condone, and ignore (Swanson, 2012).

We posit that the practices in prisons and jails must change, as must the focus of the judicial system. Our vantage point as scholars of the history of incarceration in the United States and prison activists in the present day has taught us that as a nation, we need to face not only the incalculable harm of both violence and crime but also the structural violence and institutional racism embedded in the criminal justice system—especially when they rise to the level of human rights violations, as they do when solitary confinement is imposed. We are at a crossroads. We can either punish or heal, but we cannot do both.

## DUNGEONS, HOLES, AND PENITENTIARIES

The largest experiment in isolation as rehabilitation was the penitentiary project itself. This project began in the same year that the United States declared its independence and the

government opened the Walnut Street Jail (1776) in Philadelphia, which was then the U.S. capital. The Walnut Street Jail was built to imprison the unemployed and mold them from the “idle and criminal” poor into the “working” poor through forced labor. Prisoners of the Walnut Street Jail were known as the “wheelbarrow men” because they were chained to wheelbarrows and released daily to clean and repair the streets of Philadelphia (Rothman, 1971/2002). The Pennsylvania Prison Society (1874) lobbied against this practice because it degraded the prisoner and did not “deal with the prisoner so as to produce the best benefit to society.”

The first penitentiary unit was built in 1790. This unit comprised 12 cells and was constructed within the existing Walnut Street Jail. It was later followed by the Auburn Penitentiary in New York (1816) and still later by the Eastern Penitentiary in Philadelphia (1829), where the first prisoner was a Black man by the name of Charles Williams:

Charles Williams, Prisoner Number One. Burglar. Light Black Skin. Five feet seven inches tall. Foot: eleven inches. Scar on nose. Scar on Thigh. Broad Mouth. Black eyes. Farmer by trade. Can read. Theft included one twenty-dollar watch, one three-dollar gold seal, one, a gold key. (Eastern State Penitentiary, n.d.)

Charles Williams would have been given prison garb and a hood would have been pulled over his head. His guards would have worn padded shoes so that the sound of their feet would not disturb the silence of the prison as they escorted him to his cell, where he would live for 2 years. His food would have been delivered through a slot in the door. He would have been given work to complete in his cell or in the walled individual exercise yard connected to his cell. On the rare occasion when he may have been removed from his cell, he would have been hooded. No one would have spoken to him unless it was necessary, and anything he uttered would not be responded to.

In these prisons, solitary confinement, prayer, and work were employed to advance repentance and subsequent rehabilitation. The immediate reports on the efficacy of solitary confinement were devastating; solitary confinement advanced a psychosis that led to terror, self-mutilation, and suicide. To preserve the experiment, which was ostensibly designed to replace corporal punishment, administrators and overseers employed cold water dunking, restraints, and “the iron gag” to limit the screams of prisoners lost in the throes of psychosis or the simple terror and anger at the assault on their humanity (Rothman, 1971/2002). Although the system was not formally abandoned until 1913 (Eastern State Penitentiary, n.d.) by the mid-1800s the penitentiary experiment was already a much-documented failure (Grassian, 2006). The most famous description of the horror of the penitentiary comes from Charles Dickens (1842): “The system is rigid, strict and hopeless solitary confinement, and I believe it, in its effects, to be cruel and wrong . . .” (p. 59). Yet, though the systemic segregation of prisoners did not fulfill its stated goal of reform, it was retained and refined as a method of punishment in the following decades—particularly against those who did not conform.

## INDIAN POLICY: FROM CONCENTRATION CAMP TO SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

As the penitentiary experiment itself was on the wane, the practice of isolation begun there was employed as a key strategy in the genocidal war against the Tribes west of the Mississippi

River. Often, captured Native leaders would be sent to U.S. penitentiaries and segregated from the rest of the prison population, occasionally in solitary confinement or in what has become known as “group isolation” (see the Lexington Control Unit section of this article).<sup>1</sup> The stories of the experiences of Native prisoners are horrifying. The torture these men endured was a political tool designed to further the government-sanctioned policies of Aboriginal genocide, punishment, and subjugation of Native leaders, thus advancing the further traumatization of Tribal communities and ensuring that political resistance would be less likely. More than a century later, this three-pronged strategy would be repeated with the leaders of liberation movements in the 1970s and again with prisoners held under the Special Administrative Measures (SAMs) put in place during the ongoing U.S. “War on Terror.” The historical use of the myriad forms of segregation as torture to advance political repression is the thread that binds all of these stories.

Dr. Clifford Canku, a Dakota elder who transcribed the letters of prisoners in their original language, described the imposition of these practices on more than 400 Dakota men who faced military tribunals in 1862 (Canku, 2013). On September 26 of that year, 1,200 Dakota men, women, and children were arrested and put on a 150-mile forced march to a concentration camp in Minnesota known as Camp Release. Over the course of the previous 6 weeks, the Dakota had fought for control of their ancestral resources after broken treaties had resulted in widespread starvation and death. In the following 2 weeks, another 800 Dakota would surrender. A five-member military commission was assembled to try summarily 393 Dakota men. These men were kept in an isolated prison at Camp Release where they were segregated from the rest of the prison population. This is the first example of group isolation and sensory deprivation. The invisibility of these men resulted in massive human rights violations evocative of contemporary conditions in Guantanamo or Abu Ghraib.

On the first day of the commission, there were 16 trials: 10 Dakota were convicted and sentenced to die. On the last day of the trials, 42 cases were heard. Ultimately, 323 Dakota were convicted, and 303 were sentenced to hang. When presented with the death warrants, President Lincoln asked for a review of all of the cases and reduced the death sentences of all but 38 of the men. Although this was clearly intended as mitigation, the starkness of the mass execution of nearly 40 Native fathers, husbands, and brothers eclipses any benevolent intention of President Lincoln. The Dakota men were hanged together while holding hands and singing the Dakota death song on December 26, 1862 (Canku, 2013). This is the largest mass execution in the history of the United States and exposes an ugly truth about the genocidal war against Native people. By way of comparison, at no time during the Civil War did such trials or executions take place (Death Penalty Information Center, 2013).

Recently, Dr. Canku has begun translating letters written by Dakota prisoners that describe their captivity (Gunderson, 2011). A story of utter deprivation emerges. Hundreds of men were housed together in a dark, windowless section of the prison that was isolated from the rest of the camp, with one wood stove to keep them warm during the cold Minnesota winter. Eventually, even that one stove was removed. The prisoners wrote that they were very cold and some were dying. These leaders spoke of great pressure to become Christians. They were

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<sup>1</sup>As late as 1976, while Dino Butler and Robert Robideau were awaiting trial for the shooting deaths of two FBI officers on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, they were held in solitary confinement on death row with a chained padlock on the exterior of a locked solid steel door. (D. Butler, personal communication, 2002)

led to understand that if they converted, they would be spared hanging. Some who refused disappeared, never to be seen again (Canku, 2013).

In a cruel twist on the silence of the penitentiaries, the letters tell the reader that even though they were isolated, the men could hear what was happening in the surrounding area through the walls of this military jail. They knew that Dakota women were forced to clean the camp; they heard the guards abuse them and listened to their cries as they were raped. The letters tell how the captive Dakota men sang to their wives so they would know they were not alone. After the 38 executions, the remaining 285 prisoners were transferred to Camp McClellan in Iowa. When they were ultimately released on March 22, 1866, the surviving prisoners numbered 177.

Twenty years later, the strategy of punitive isolation would be used again when an Apache leader named Goyahkla (the yawner) surrendered to U.S. General Nelson Miles on a promise that he would be reunited with his wife, children, and extended family. His Tribe, the San Carlos Apache, had been forcibly relocated to Florida. Goyahkla, known to many as “Geronimo,” had resisted the U.S. and Mexican armies for more than 30 years. Goyahkla’s campaign of resistance began after the Mexican army slaughtered his first wife, his mother, and three of his small children. From 1870 until his surrender, he refused to stay within the confines of the reservation, a concentration camp set aside for his people in the Arizona desert. He and 20 Apache men fought against the forced removal of his people. His resistance was long and harsh.

In 1886, General Miles commanded 5,000 soldiers and 500 Native trackers in the hunt for Goyahkla and his men. They were not defeated but came in after the agreement was brokered. A surrender ceremony was arranged, after which photographs were taken and Goyahkla was shipped by railroad car to the deserted Fort Pickens on Santa Rosa Island off the coast of Florida, where he was kept totally isolated in solitary confinement for 2 years. There he was forced to do hard labor “sawing up large logs” (Barnett, 1906). His family was expelled to an area over 300 miles away from Santa Rosa. It would be nearly 8 years before he would be reunited with his family.

We know nothing about the conditions Goyahkla endured. We know he survived—but Edward Curtis’s photos of Goyahkla taken in 1905 demonstrate that his health had suffered. Goyahkla had surrendered, he was thousands of miles from his homeland, he was impoverished, and he had given up his weapons and agreed to live in the concentration camp with his family. Goyahkla was imprisoned in solitary confinement to demonstrate that he could be utterly defeated and as a warning to his people against further resistance. This placement of Goyahkla in isolation was not as punishment for the 30 years of raids on the U.S./Mexican border; he was kept separate from his people to assure that his leadership would not take root in his community and to assure that, when he was returned, the Apache would see an aged man in ill health. His imprisonment was a deliberate act of searing oppression, a penultimate act of genocide.

In 1888, he was transferred to an Alabama jail where 352 Apache men were imprisoned along with their families and forced to labor (Barnett, 1906). We know much about the conditions of forced laborers in the post–Civil War era in the South. We know they built roads through swamps and were forced to sleep in cages open to the night air, insects, and snakes. We know they were forced to labor in mines when miners struck for better conditions. We know those miners were so scandalized by the conditions the prisoners endured that they came in the night and freed them. In the first 8 months of captivity, 19 of the Apaches died

(Hass, 2011). Eventually, in 1894, when the Tribe was relocated to Oklahoma, Goyahkla was also relocated to Fort Sill in Lawton, OK. He had prisoner of war status until his death from pneumonia in 1909 (Barrett, 1909). Goyahkla's story teaches us that the state acts not only to injure individuals and disrupt their communities but also to let other resisters know that they, too, can be broken by isolation. The next section documents how this practice was carried into the 20th century.

### SENSORY DEPRIVATION: LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR THE 20TH-CENTURY USE OF ISOLATION AS TORTURE

In 1890, 2 years after Goyahkla was released from isolation at Fort Pickens, the U.S. Supreme Court acknowledged that isolation was cruel and unusual punishment in *In re Medley* 134 US 160, 1890. A Colorado court convicted Mr. James J. Medley of murdering his wife and sentenced him to die after 1 month's further incarceration. Under a new state law, he was sent to the Colorado state prison and placed in solitary confinement for this 1-month waiting period, rather than the customary holding in the county jail. He appealed his case, arguing that the new law had made his confinement substantially more burdensome than awaiting execution in a less secure setting like the county jail. He additionally argued that the new law's application to him was *ex post facto*. The U.S. Supreme Court agreed with Medley, holding that this new punishment was too egregious to ignore and released him from prison. In the decision, the justices explained,

This matter of solitary confinement is not . . . a mere unimportant regulation as to the safekeeping of the prisoner. . . . Experience [with the penitentiary system] demonstrated that there were serious objections to it. A considerable number of prisoners fell, after even short confinement, into a semi-fatuous condition, from which it was next to impossible to arouse them, and others became violently insane; others, still, committed suicide; while those who stood the ordeal better were not generally reformed and in most cases did not recover sufficient mental activity to be of any subsequent service to the community. (United States Supreme Court Center, 1890)

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that isolation was so harmful that a person who had murdered and was sentenced to die should be freed and escape his death sentence because the additional burden of 1 month's incarceration in solitary confinement was so onerous as to demand redress. Ironically, this dramatic U.S. Supreme Court decision did little to slow the proliferation of isolation in the United States.

In fact, the information gleaned from experiments in the 18th- and 19th-century penitentiaries was put to use in further study of "brainwashing" and development of psychological torture in the 20th century. The concern raised about the brainwashing of political prisoners in the Soviet Union and in China "gave rise to a major body of scientific and medical literature as to the effects of sensory deprivation and social isolation" (Grassian, 2006). Chillingly, it also led to a substantial number of experiments (Biderman & Zimmer, 1961). During the first half of the 20th century, a time of global political upheaval in which two world wars were fought, new ideologies were developed and whole nations were forced to accept these ideologies. During the Cold War period, the CIA engaged in decades of human subject research about the use of

sensory deprivation and isolation (McCoy, 2006). This resulted in the scientific development of a practice the CIA named “no-touch torture.” Dr. Alfred McCoy (2006) uncovered the practice in researching his book on the use of torture in the War on Terror.

The CIA’s psychological paradigm for “no touch” torture fused two new methods, “sensory disorientation” and “self-inflicted pain,” whose combination, in theory, would cause victims to feel responsible for their own suffering and thus capitulate more readily to their torturers. Refined through years of practice, sensory disorientation relies on a mix of sensory overload and sensory deprivation via banal procedures, isolation then intense interrogation, heat and cold, light and dark, noise and silence, for a systematic attack on all human stimuli. The fusion of these two techniques, sensory disorientation and self-inflicted pain, creates a synergy of physical and psychological trauma whose sum is a hammer-blow to the existential platforms of personal identity. In 2004, the Red Cross reported: “The construction of such a system . . . cannot be considered other than an intentional system of cruel, unusual and degrading treatment and a form of torture.” (McCoy, 2006)

The period from 1955 to 1980 was characterized by the emergence of social movements for change in the United States, including the civil rights movement the free speech movement, the American Indian movement, the Black Power movement, the anti-imperialist movement, the prisoner’s rights movement, and the anti-Vietnam War movement. A new generation decided that change was possible and that public expression of the need for that change would be tolerated. People took to the streets to demand equity, justice, and an affirmation of the humanity of all. Repression was swift: Civil rights workers were killed with impunity, dogs and fire hoses were turned on children, and university students were shot. The National Guard besieged the Oglala Lakota at the small church in Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation for 73 days, resulting in the death of two Native men.

Over a 2-year period at least 18 Black Panther Party members were shot, 10 killed by the police in various jurisdictions. Most notable among these were the murders of Fred Hampton and Marc Clark at the hands of the Chicago police on December 4, 1969. Hampton was shot while sleeping in his bed (Gregory, 1969). The government, in response to the massive outcry against social inequities and for national liberation from oppression, utilized counterintelligence programs called COINTELPRO, conducted by a dozen federal agencies, to cripple any group, no matter how moderate, that dared to dissent. The more successful organizations, like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Black Panther Party, the American Friends Service Committee and the American Indian Movement, were infiltrated and investigated (Church Committee, 1975). Over the years that these directives were carried out, many young leaders were put in prisons across the country; some, now in their 60s and 70s, are still there.

Although the United States has always denied that any people are detained in prison within the United States for political reasons, prisoner advocates repeatedly heard of the existence of political prisoners, and of the particular treatment they endured once imprisoned. As early as 1978, Andrew Young, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, was widely quoted saying, “We still have hundreds of people I would categorize as political prisoners in our prisons.” When these activists arrived in prison, they encountered a groundswell of organizing for far-reaching prison reform led by prisoners (Bissonette, 2008). It is in this context that we begin to see the use of long-term isolation to control political activism (Bissonette, 2008). The use



of segregation to control these populations was pioneered in California (Soledad), New Jersey (Trenton), and Massachusetts (Walpole).<sup>2</sup>

In 1973, the first control unit in the federal system at the United States Penitentiary (USP) in Marion was opened in Illinois. USP Marion was built to replace Alcatraz and designed to house 500 “adult male felons who are difficult to control” (Congressional testimony by George Pickett in Mitford, 1973, p. 199). The control unit at USP Marion, comprising 72 cells, was created to house 60 men who had participated in a work strike following the beating of a prisoner by a guard. These 60 men were placed in H-Block and enrolled in the “Care And Rehabilitation Effort.” Ultimately, this unit became known as the Long-term Control Unit.<sup>3</sup> It differed from the Marion Disciplinary Segregation Unit (I-Unit) in that prisoners were in administrative rather than disciplinary segregation, meaning they were isolated as a result of arbitrary administrative decisions rather than through an articulated due-process punishment policy. In 1978 the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) added “security-level 6” to its classification system. Security-level 6 is characterized by 24-hr, 7-day-a-week lockdown. Prisoners were classified to this level because they were deemed to constitute a security threat (U.S. Department of Justice, 1997). Over the next four decades, the AFSC would track what became known as the “Marionization” of all state and federal prisons.

Although the prisonwide Marion lockdown did not happen until 1983 (after several violent incidents), as early as 1981 the BOP issued a report detailing “plans to convert the entire prison into a control unit” (Breed & Ward, 1984). This report was commissioned after prisoners engaged in a peaceful work strike combined with hunger strikes that lasted from September 1980 to January 1981 (Dowker & Good, 1992). On October 27, 1983, the BOP implemented the full lockdown plans after two guards were killed in the Long-Term Control Unit. Eventually, the Long-Term Control Unit was expanded from its original 72 cells to include all 353 Marion prisoners (Dowker & Good, 1992). In 1994, USP Marion was replaced with ADX Florence in Colorado.

The “control” unit is exactly that: Each prisoners is housed in a single cell, alone. Visits and phone calls are severely restricted, reading material is limited to what can be packed into a 1 by 1 ft crate, television and radio privileges must be earned, visual access to the world is minimized through slim windows, and time outside the cell is limited—usually to 5 hr a week in 1-hr segments. In addition, lights are on 24 hr a day, ambient noise relentlessly echoes, punctuated by eerie silence, and prisoners are under constant surveillance. This is not the dark “hole” of popular imagery but a bright, polished, cold, clinical environment that creates total individual isolation. Communication among prisoners is limited to what can be fished to each other on a “kite,” a small piece of folded paper that can be attached to a string and shot under the door of another cell. Prisoners in segregation must earn their visits and phone calls with sustained good behavior while living in an environment that creates psychosis and breaks down social skills. Often, the only human communication is with correctional personnel and is relegated to simple commands and yes/no answers.

This model of corrections management of special populations was universally accepted before any evaluation could be done to determine the effect it had on prisoners. When lawsuits

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<sup>2</sup>Trenton Prison is now New Jersey State Prison, and Walpole Prison is now Massachusetts Correctional Institution, Cedar Junction.

<sup>3</sup>*Adams v. Carlson*, 1973:621-2 (Mikulas, 1975; Gruenberg, 1975).

were ultimately filed, expert witnesses provided testimony to the brutality and ineffectiveness of segregation (Grassian, 2006). Today, similar units exist in 44 states and within the BOP. The most recent Census Report available stated that 81,622 people were classified to “restricted housing” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). This number does not include the numbers of people held in isolation in county, juvenile, and immigration facilities.

### HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH: THE LEXINGTON CONTROL UNIT

Having described the development of 20th century use of isolation, this article next considers an extreme example: the Lexington High Security Unit, a control unit that operated during the 1980s in the women’s federal prison in Lexington, KY. Because little has been written about the Lexington Control Unit from an academic perspective despite the intervening 27 years, the upcoming discussion is based on descriptions from the women who were housed in the Lexington Control Unit and on the documentation from advocates that led to the permanent closure of that unit in August of 1988. These records have been preserved in the Freedom Archives.

In 1986, the U.S. BOP opened a new high-security women’s prison. Below that prison, in the basement, a new control unit was constructed, the Special Housing Unit (SHU). Of the five women who were ever classified by the U.S. BOP to that unit, three were political prisoners: Alejandrina Torres, Susan Rosenberg, and Sylvia Baraldini. After completing a review of the unit for the ACLU, Dr. Richard Korn concluded that “[the mission of this unit was] to reduce prisoners to a state of submission essential for their ideological conversion . . . that failing, the only alternative is to destroy them, preferably by making them desperate enough to destroy themselves” (O’Melveny, 1992, p. 117). All of the study and planning to implement sensory deprivation, sexual humiliation, and, variably, “no touch torture” came together below USP Lexington, aimed at the bodies, minds, and souls of these young women. Of interest, at the time, Ralph Arons, a former warden at Marion, was quoted as saying, “The purpose of the Marion Control Unit is to control revolutionary attitudes in the prison system and in society at large” (Whitman, 1988, p. 25).

The regulations for the SHU were eerily indicative of the regulations that would be developed for the Communications Management Units (2002) in Marion, IL, and Terre Haute, IN (Freedom Archives, n.d., c. 1986–1987).

1. The SHU is totally isolated from the rest of the prison.
2. Social visits are allowed only from immediate family.
3. All visitors, including attorneys, must have a background check, be photographed, and approved by the BOP.
4. Prisoners will be strip-searched each time they leave the cell. (All of the prisoners reported that male guards would hold them down and perform rectal and vaginal finger probes during these searches.)
5. Correspondence was limited to 15 people who must pass a rigorous background check.
6. No personal belongings were allowed. (Even sanitary napkins had to be requested one at a time.)
7. No periodicals allowed.

8. Reading material could only come from the prison library.
9. No educational programming was offered.

In addition, the women had to endure bright white walls, lights on 24 hr a day, separation by thick Plexiglas during visits with loved ones, cameras in the shower area, and no view of the outside world—ever. Over the course of 20 months, each of the women developed measurable physical responses to their isolation. To varying degrees, they lost large amounts of weight (20–49 lb), lost hair, and stopped sleeping.

On July 17, 1988, when four women remained in the unit, Judge Parker ordered the release of political prisoners Sylvia Baraldini, Alejandrina Torres, and Susan Rosenberg to general population. In his decision, Judge Parker opined,

Defendants may be concerned that the two plaintiffs<sup>4</sup> will persuade inmates within the general prison population to share their political views, but those fears cannot be accommodated at the expense of constitutional rights. . . . The treatment of the plaintiffs has skirted elemental standards of human decency. The exaggerated security, small group isolation and staff harassment serve to constantly undermine the inmates' morale. (*Baraldini v. Meese*, 691 F.Supp. 432 (D.D.C.1988))

Sadly, one defendant of the four left was not included in the decision: Sylvia Brown. Judge Parker did not include Ms. Brown because she was not placed in the SHU for political reasons, illustrating how the general prison population is also highly vulnerable to constitutional and human rights violations. Rather than release the prisoners to general population, the SHU was permanently closed and the women were transferred to a segregation unit in the DC Metropolitan Jail. In this case, as in many others involving isolation, victory and defeat shared a border.

### CASE STUDY: OJORE LUTALO—AFSC PRISON WATCH

Although little was known about the Lexington control unit until investigations brought its abuses to light, other instances of isolation were well documented by the AFSC, which began collecting reports from men incarcerated in control units and held in long-term administrative segregation as early as 1971 (Bissonette, 2008). In the mid-1980s, when the shift in general prison policy toward incapacitation and segregation began to emerge, Bonnie Kerness at the AFSC Prison Watch Program received reports of an enhanced use of sensory deprivation/isolation units and “incentive programs” that were rooted in behavior modification. AFSC began to monitor this growing “special treatment” intentionally.

The first report of the Management Control Unit at Trenton State Prison in New Jersey came to AFSC in a letter from Ojore Lutalo. He was understandably confused by his classification and asked what a control unit was, why he was there, and how long he would have to stay. Within months, AFSC and other advocates began hearing from prisoners throughout the country, saying that they were being held in extended isolation as punishment for political reasons or for

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<sup>4</sup>The plaintiffs were Sylvia Baraldini and Susan Rosenberg.

organizing activities. We heard from a wide range of incarcerated people—including jailhouse lawyers, Muslims, political prisoners, Native Americans, mentally ill prisoners, and prisoner activists—who were classified to new units where they were locked down in 24/7 solitary confinement. Later, we also heard from individuals with no history of political involvement who were being classified to these units after disciplinary hearings that were regulated by due process principles. Eventually, children who had already spent months in these units and feared that the months would turn into years contacted us. And the months did turn into years: 5, then 10, then 20, and in a few cases 25 years.<sup>5</sup> These are three of the many voices that speak through the letters received by Prison Watch:

I went in when I was 14. They have what they call the “hole.” Kids that fight go in there. If you refuse, they come and get you. You get a shower once a week and they bring the food to you. I was so cold. (New Jersey)

John was directed to leave the strip cell and a urine soaked pillow case was placed over his head like a hood. He was walked, shackled and hooded to a different cell where he was placed in a device called “the chair” where he was kept for over 30 hours resulting in extreme physical and emotional suffering. (Draper, Utah)

I was locked in isolation, sitting there week after week, month after month. Not once was I ever taken out of my cell which had a window that was four inches wide. I started to rub my nails against the rubber seal around the window. It was a thick, hard rubber which I rubbed for months with bleeding nails. It took 8 months to get a tiny opening to feel fresh air. (Edna Mahan Correctional Institution for Women, New Jersey)

The thread that binds the aforementioned testimonies is that they are from men, women, and children held in isolation units, witnessing and experiencing the use of devices of torture in cages invisible to the public. In 1986, the AFSC Prison Watch began to collect the testimonies of prisoners held in isolation and respond to their complaints. Prison Watch received thousands of descriptions and drawings evocative of the measures taken by the early penitentiary designers—of 4- and 5-point restraints, restraint hoods, restraint belts, restraint beds, stun grenades, stun guns, stun belts, spit hoods, black boxes, tethers, waist chains, and leg chains used to control men and women who struggle against their confinement in isolation or who are exhibiting the effects of the psychological trauma brought on by no-touch torture.

In solitary confinement, each prisoner is confined in an 8 × 10-ft. cage in a warehouse for human beings. There may be a dozen cages on either side, with more tiers of cages above and below. Prisoners are confined in eerie silence for 23 to 24 hr a day, with a thick steel door between them and the rest of the world. One prisoner reported that on the first noncontact “window” visit with his lawyer, he was rectally searched three times going to the visit and three times when being returned, despite the fact that he hadn’t been in the same room with another human being for 6 months. Prisoner Robert Dellelo explained how, when he met with his lawyer,

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<sup>5</sup>The AFSC worked on the following cases: Charlie Chase, MA 27 years; Hakim Obba, 5 years in Marion and 10 in MA DDU until he committed suicide in 2003; Robert Dellelo, 5 years MA DDU; Ojore Lutalo, 22 and later 5 years in NJ MCU; Belton Brim, 18 years NJ MCU; Charles Glenn, 18 years NJ MCU.

I began to sweat, I couldn't concentrate. I did not know where to look. It is hard to believe, but I just wanted to get out of the room and go back to my cell. Later on I realized that I was confused because it had been months since I had seen a whole body. You only see a part of the body through the narrow window in your cell. Seeing a whole body that moved unpredictably was very unsettling. Once I understood what had happened, I could deal with it. But, I will never forget the way that simply seeing another human being threw me into total confusion. (Interview with Robert Dellelo, January 2008)

As these reports became more numerous, Bonnie Kerness of AFSC started to separate and archive strategies for survival inside control units. *Prison Watch* worked with California Prison Focus to publish *The Survivors Manual*, a book written by people in solitary confinement for people in solitary confinement (AFSC, *The Survivors Manual*).<sup>6</sup>

At the time the AFSC began collecting testimony, we had no idea how many people were experiencing this form of torture, or what conditions were like in those units, or how many control units there were. As AFSC gathered information, we saw the necessity of opening a national conversation to share and interpret our findings. This conversation developed into the National Campaign to Stop Control Unit Prisons (NCSCUP) in 1994. In 1996, NCSCUP did the first comprehensive survey of conditions in control unit prisons (Weinstein, Donner, Burton-Rose, & Starger, 1997). This fundamental work underpinned public efforts to address the proliferation of solitary confinement units and later entire prisons, funding for which had been written into the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994.

The story of Lutalo, who first contacted us in 1986, exemplifies the history of control units. He was released from the control unit through litigation in 2002 after 16 years in isolation, but in 2004 he was placed back into isolation with no explanation. When AFSC called the NJ Department of Corrections, AFSC was told that Lutalo's assignment to isolation had been made at the request of the Department of Homeland Security. In a 2008 Classification decision, the political nature of his classification was confirmed to Lutalo in writing as well: "[The Department] continues to show concern regarding your admitted affiliation with the Black Liberation Army. Your radical views and ability to influence others poses a threat to the orderly operation of this Institution" (NJ DOC Classification Report # 59860901548, March 5, 2008). After a combined 22 years of living in isolation, he was released from prison in August 2009 by court order.

Ojore Lutalo's treatment is also characteristic of the treatment accorded to anyone even perceived to be a follower of Islam. On January 26, 2010, he was taken from an Amtrak train and accused of "endangering public transportation" (Amtrak officials alleged he had made a threat to "blow up the train"). He was placed into custody in La Junta, Colorado, where he was held for 3 days. Because of his unusual name, newspaper articles pegged him as Muslim and reported that he was heard "talking about Al Qaeda" (McShae, 2010). A judge dismissed the case after the prosecutor dropped all charges 1 week later because nobody actually reported hearing a threat (Banda, 2010). But the use of extended isolation as punishment for political or organizing activities continued.

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<sup>6</sup>It is important to note that Prison Watch relied upon survival mechanisms developed by U.S. political prisoners who were consciously tactical in their commitment to maintain their mental health.

## SECURITY THREAT GROUPS: TAKING IT “TO THE STREETS”

Ojore Lutalo and many others like him who shared their sufferings with AFSC in the 1980s were targeted for isolation because of their political involvements. But in the 1990s, the definition of “security threats” was broadened to include young men of color arrested for drug and gang activity. In the early 1990s, street formulations took control of the crack cocaine trade in all of the major cities in the United States (Howell & Decker, 1999). The lucrative economic benefit of dealing crack cocaine exacerbated already tense territorial claims of street gangs. Protection of “turf” became increasingly virulent and increasingly deadly as gun violence and murder increased. This impact reverberated in all areas of the criminal justice system. Sentencing structures were amended to add enhanced penalties for crack cocaine that were 99 times those of powder cocaine. Monies were made available for law enforcement to heavily police “impacted communities,” and a new set of tools that included relaxed stop-and-search regulations were developed as part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. Gangs became known as Security Threat Groups (STGs) and the War on Drugs was ratcheted up to such a level that, for the first time, young Black men were more likely to go to prison than to avail themselves of any form of higher education.

Simultaneously, the Department of Justice developed a line of funding for state and federal prisons to address STGs. These monies were available only to prisons that developed a STG Program, the cornerstone of which was the STG Management Unit—another kind of control unit designed to house youth of color who were suspected of gang involvement. These programs were characterized by a broadly applied point-based STG identification policy, some of the more egregious components of which were as follows:

1. Any tattoo would place a person at over half of the number of points to qualify.
2. A gang of “one” could be created to accommodate an individual who appeared to be part of an unidentified STG.
3. White formulations like the Aryan Brotherhood or the KKK were not included in the application of the policies.
4. Being a relative or a friend of an identified gang member counted as gang membership.
5. Speaking another language resulted in points.
6. Entire races—as for example “Asians” or “Native Americans”—were identified by some states as gangs.
7. Being observed hanging around with one other person, whether that person was gang involved or not, could result in identification. (U.S. Department of Justice, 1997)

These policies resulted in an overidentification of young prisoners as STG members (U.S. Department of Justice, 1997). The point-based identification system caused almost all Latino prisoners to be at serious risk for gang status. Notable examples of people named as gang members and placed in segregation from the AFSC Criminal Justice Program internal documentation were as follows:

- An elderly prisoner who worked to teach young men to read and happened to have a Black Panther poster was identified as a member of a STG: The Black Panther Party. (MCI Cedar Junction, MA)

- A young Latino man who was convicted of drug possession was noted to have a bumblebee tattooed on his arm. He also spoke Spanish on the phone to his mother. He had no contact with any known gang members so he was identified as a gang of one: “The Killer Bees.” (MCI Concord, MA)
- A young woman who spoke Spanish and wore religious beads that were white and red was found to have a tattoo of a rose on her labia during a gynecological exam. She was identified as a member of the Blood formulation although she had no documented gang affiliation. (MCI Framingham, MA)
- A young Native woman talked to her child and sang her a lullaby in the Lakota language. She was identified as a gang member for speaking a secret language. (MCI Lompoc, CA)

Over the past decade and a half, the methods of identification (now called validation) have changed, as have the various levels of STG identification. In California, for example, there are now six recommended levels of classification, four of which result in some form of segregated housing, and two levels in complete isolation (State of California, 2012).

The conditions inside the STG Units are frighteningly violent. Many lawsuits have been brought on behalf of prisoners who have been beaten, gassed, tasered, and restrained. One notable case, *Torres v. DuBois* No. 94-0270 E, brought in Massachusetts, included affidavits describing how young Latino men were brought into the gym at MCI Cedar Junction. They were made to face the wall while they listened to others be beaten. If they turned around to look, they were next. Then they were placed in isolation units by assumed gang affiliation. This treatment was followed by widespread resistance, with prisoners refusing to return food trays and using them to make noise in the unit. Such acts of resistance behind locked cells led to further violence and longer classifications in segregation units. This cycle repeats itself in many prisons and was documented on a smuggled camera by a young New Jersey prisoner classified to the gang unit in the short film *Sneak Peek—Inside a New Jersey State Prison* (Schram, 2012).

### SPECIAL ADMINISTRATIVE MEASURES AND COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT UNITS

Just as the War on Drugs heralded an expansion in the use of isolation in prisons, so has the War on Terror. After the first bombing of the World Trade Center in New York in 1993, SAMs were developed as directives to U.S. Attorneys in order to monitor pretrial detainees charged with perpetrating acts of terror against the US (9-24.000 Request for Special Confinement Conditions 28 C.F.R. § 501.3). After September 11, 2001, these measures were applied not only to pretrial detainees but also to those convicted of acts of terror and people already imprisoned who were identified as spreading ideology that might result in the radicalization of other prisoners.<sup>7</sup> Currently, 49 prisoners under are held in the two Communication Management Units (CMU) in the United States (Bunn, 2012)—one at USP Terre Haute, IN, and one at USP Marion, OH.

SAMs are intended to interfere with basic human communication in an effort to control and isolate these individuals. Unless already engaged in litigation, a prisoner under SAM cannot

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<sup>7</sup>AFSC has received reports of gang members who are subjected to SAMs while awaiting trial.

initiate contact with a lawyer himself; the attorney must know what kind of legal assistance the individual needs and then must initiate the contact from outside. All attorneys with clients under SAMs must agree to have their communication with their clients monitored, in essence waiving their attorney–client privilege. Attorneys are forbidden to communicate with anyone other than their clients except when the communication is centered in the legal process of the case in which they are currently involved. Only the attorney of record may discuss the case with the client. This means that law school clinics or volunteer lawyers may not work with these prisoners.

Control Management Units for people under SAMs were created not only to isolate prisoners but also to restrict their communication. In CMUs, prisoners are locked in group isolation—completely segregated from the rest of the prison population. They are allowed visits from their immediate family only: wife, husband, father, mother, or child. All visitors must undergo an extensive background check and approval process. Prisoners have no access to periodicals or newspapers. All of their mail is scrutinized, and they can receive letters only from their attorney and approved immediate family visitors. Homeland Security SAMs require people classified under these measures to spend the entirety of their prison sentences in one of the two CMUs. Of the 49 prisoners classified to the CMUs, 44 were held under SAMs: 29 were held on terrorism related charges, 11 under charges related to violent crime, and four on espionage charges (Bunn, 2012).

### MANUFACTURING DESPERATION AND HOPELESSNESS

Unfortunately, even children are not exempt from long-term solitary confinement. In Mississippi, a prison was constructed for juveniles who had been sentenced to spend their natural lives in prison. Because they were never to be released, the Mississippi Department of Corrections reasoned that program resources were wasteful; it would be sufficient to simply warehouse the juveniles. A control unit devoid of programming was built, consisting of two rows of 8 × 10-ft cells behind solid steel doors separated by a thin corridor. The prison had no dining room, no space for education or other programs, and dog-runs adapted for humans where these children are allowed caged outdoor “recreation.” The children, all of whom were Black, had not broken any prison rules; they were sent there because they were sentenced to life without the possibility of parole. Before the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that sentencing a juvenile offender to life without the possibility of parole was unconstitutional (*Graham v. Florida*, 130S.Ct. 2011, 2010), 61.9% of juvenile lifers were held in isolation without access to any forms of programming (Nellis, 2012). Now that these youthful offenders are eligible for release, they will take their place among the thousands of U.S. prisoners who have spent a significant period in isolation—thousands of men and women who have undergone psychological torture and who have never been offered an opportunity to heal from that torture. This reality transfers itself to the street in ever-deepening pain often ending in suicide, assault, and even murder.

In Massachusetts, the AFSC had advocated for a young man who was imprisoned on non-violent drug related charges. His mother and his minister came to the office to ask for help. This young man had a reputation for being sweet but gullible. His minister described him as a slow learner, and as very kind. This young man had learning disabilities and had difficulty reading; the booklet of prison rules was unintelligible to him. Despite our advocacy efforts, he



eventually wound up in the Massachusetts Control Unit, the Departmental Disciplinary Unit. His original classification was 18 months in the DDU. To get a radio or television he had to be able to follow all the rules for 6 weeks, but sitting still with nothing to listen to and unable to read caused him great mental distress, so inevitably the 18 months grew into the rest of his prison sentence. Then he was released directly to the home of his mother and younger brother.

His family tried to support him. He did find work, but like many survivors of long-term segregation, he could not tolerate being touched. A simple brush of his arm could send him into a rage. One day his mother heard him begin to yell at his brother and then she heard silence, then footsteps on the stairs and a knock at her bedroom door. She opened the door and saw her son covered in blood, crying and holding a knife. He said, "Mama, call the police, I killed my brother."

This is not an isolated incident. As segregation sentences stretch out into the decades, more people are being released from isolation units directly to the street, and the repercussions are terrifying. One prisoner who spent 15 years in isolation was released to the street. He was a jailhouse lawyer who provided reliable information to advocates on the outside. After 3 months on the street, he came to the AFSC office and said he was not going to make it. He was afraid of people, irrationally angry over small things. He did not know what to do. We were able to intervene and get him counseling from a therapist who specialized in torture victims. This man survived and is doing well, but he is the exception. Most victims of isolation do not reach out until it is too late, until they have harmed a family member or until they have harmed themselves.

## DEFINING ISOLATION AS PSYCHOLOGICAL TORTURE

The debate about solitary confinement is complicated by vocabulary. Punitive segregation is described in a variety of ways, with the terms "isolation," "segregation," or "solitary confinement." In the debate about solitary confinement, these names are significant because units called segregation, solitary confinement, or isolation are each subject to distinct rules and constitutional protections. This is largely a game of semantics because all of these settings encompass a specific set of environmental factors that, considered together, constitute psychological torture. These conditions are imposed in a series of diversely named units: Control Unit, Special Management Unit, Special Housing Unit, Departmental Disciplinary Unit, Super Max, High Security Unit, Communications Management Unit, Management Control Unit, and so on.

After witnessing brutal tactics of state oppression, Dr. Almerindo Ojeda of the University of California, who is from Peru, began to study human rights abuses in detention centers throughout the Americas. Eventually, he was asked to look at conditions in maximum-security prisons in the United States and in that work has labeled a set of conditions as "psychological torture." What constitutes psychological torture? Those who work with people in the aftermath of torture have drawn two conclusions that are important in this article (Kupers, 2008). The first is that psychological torture can occur independent of direct intent. The second is that, unlike physical torture, psychological torture occurs as a result of a set of environmental factors, not the direct actions of people. The factors that create an environment where psychological torture is inescapable can and do come together independent of articulated purpose. Factors

that are considered to contribute to psychological torture include isolation; deprivation of food, water, or sleep; spatial disorientation through confinement in small places with nonfunctional windows; temporal disorientation due to denial of natural light; either sensory deprivation or overstimulation; and induced desperation through indefinite detention or random placement.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, all of these conditions exist in the many isolation units throughout the United States. In combination, even a few of these conditions can lead to psychological breakdown. When many of the factors are present, breakdown is inescapable. If psychological breakdown is induced as a direct result of the environment a person is placed in, psychological torture has taken place.

Physical conditions that occur in isolation can also contribute to prisoners' mental deterioration. For example, prisoners who are in punitive segregation units are often limited in the quantity of food and water they can consume. Prison food may not be good—in fact, it is often unhealthy—but in general population, prisoners can supplement their diets with additional food purchased in the commissary or by eating more in the chow hall. Prisoners in the United States do not starve—unless they are in punitive segregation. While prisoners are in isolation, intake is limited to what can fit through the meal slot. Sometimes this is “nutraloaf,” an unpleasant-tasting biscuit touted as meeting all the nutritional needs of an adult. The vast majority of prisoners lose large quantities of weight while in segregation (Grassien, 2006).

On the occasion that a prisoner is flooding his or her cell with feces and urine, the water is turned off to the cell. In Massachusetts, this went on so long that one man died from dehydration (AFSC Archives, 1998). Sleep can be constantly interrupted. Every 45 min around the clock, guards walk the block opening and closing mechanized steel doors, clicking their heels on the floor; some prisoners report that guards bang the walls with their nightsticks or flashlights as they walk along the corridors. In addition, lights are never out and ambient temperatures are often extremely cold or hot. Prisoners develop sensitivity to noise and report an inability to sleep beyond a 45-min stretch for years following their release from the unit (Dellelo, 2010).

Food, water, and sleep are necessities, not incentives, but necessary to life itself (Kerness, 2009). Although AFSC and many advocates recommend closing and repurposing these isolation units (Kupers et al., 2009), in the interim the onerous conditions prisoners face must be addressed. Often, basic remedies are simply practical solutions: the availability of adequate, palatable, and nutritional food (nutritional biscuits do not meet this standard); limited commissary; and water. Should the water be shut off, drinking water could be offered by the cup at regulated intervals. It may be necessary to monitor individuals who have the potential to harm themselves, but if conditions were changed in these units, this number would be much smaller and lights could easily be turned off and on at specific times.

Problems created by the design of these units are more difficult to solve. Spatial disorientation is caused by confinement in small places with nonfunctional windows. Prisoners become accustomed to viewing the world through a narrow window embedded in the door or the wall and become disoriented when they are presented with a broader view (Dellelo, 2010). A high-security structure that is designed and built regardless of the actual impact that results from forced occupation of that space nearly 100% of the time is very difficult to “remodel.” But the option of an open grilled door would greatly reduce the damage. Most punitive segregation units

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<sup>8</sup>This includes intentional placement situations where prisoners are suddenly moved from one solitary confinement setting to another, sometimes to another prison.

provide a combination of sensory deprivation and overstimulation exacerbated by architectural design that creates a hollow echoing of all sound. Prisoners in the same unit can experience an eerie silence that makes them believe that the sound of the ventilation system contains a voice that calls their names, or a cacophony of hollering and shouting from acute physical or psychological stress. The only remedy is productive activity in meaningful programs. At the most basic-level programming can be offered through the television, progressing to congregated learning where individuals can begin to practice the social skills necessary to return to general population.

Perhaps the deepest trauma is that of induced desperation through indefinite detention or random placement. The relentless use of punishments and deprivation as disincentives causes prisoners who do not possess the skills necessary to comply to feel a hollow despair that they will never be released. This despair is reiterated in every suicide note; half of the successful suicides in prison occur among the 6 to 8% of prisoners who are confined in segregation (Kupers, 2008). Despite regulations, a number of prisoners are placed in or kept in isolation for reasons that have nothing to do with their behavior or their ideology (most commonly, overcrowding prevents a return to general population). Recently it was found that 22 of 120 prisoners in the Maine Special Management Unit should have been in general population (Magnusson, 2010).

### BRINGING THE THREADS TOGETHER

Beyond the environmental factors that create psychological torture, there are important questions that must be asked. What is the purpose of segregation or isolation? Who is being classified to these units, and why? We need to admit that this collection of practices does not meet any correctional objectives and it is not effective (Kupers, 2008). When we implement a remedy to solve a problem, we take on the responsibility for the outcome. That the remedy in question is harming the individuals who are kept in isolation cells (who in turn harm others) is evident by the high recidivism rate—47% commit new felonies and 36% commit new crimes on persons, compared to 38% and 21% respectively for all releases (Lovell & Johnson, 2003). These broken men, women, and sometimes children are our collective responsibility. Given these statistics and the increasing numbers of people affected by segregation while imprisoned, the question is not only “What are we to do with them?” but more important, “When are we going to stop breaking them?”

At the beginning of this article, we said that prisons are political in purpose. In the 18th century, the purpose was to harness the “idle poor,” as in the case of the wheelbarrow men. In the 19th century, the Thirteenth Amendment’s prohibition of slavery except for “those convicted of crime” encouraged the forced labor of prisoners, essentially nationalizing slavery. Within a decade of emancipation, these institutions were used to isolate, incapacitate, punish, and execute Aboriginal leaders. In the 20th century, prisons and, later, solitary confinement were used to control political expression and eventually the lives of more than 2 million human beings. These purposes undeniably and verifiably affect Black and Brown communities, Native communities, and poor communities.

Departments of correction do not take responsibility for the harm done in these units. There are few transitional programs from segregation to general population. Therefore, the recidivism

rates of people contained in the units are high. Recidivism after release is regularly tracked but rarely broken out by security status of the individual at the time of their release; however, one such study that was completed in Washington State found that a person released from isolation was 9% more likely to commit a felony and 15% more likely to commit assault within a year of their release (Lovell & Johnson, 2003). That is, more than one in three people released from solitary confinement will harm another human being.

In communities of color already struggling with high rates of unemployment, poverty, and homelessness, the compounding affects of criminal justice policy result in one of two men spending time in prison during their lives (Justice Mapping Center, 2013). The increasing deprivation within prisons is a significant contributor to their despair as these ever-rippling circles of harm manifest themselves as violence, addiction, and chaos (Swanson, 2012). Ending isolation is no longer a recommendation: it is an imperative. Failing to act is not only unethical, but it is an untenable act of structural violence.

Those of us who have been documenting isolation for decades can never forget the roots of this practice. The deliberate use of long-term sensory deprivation haunts us. Today, many people who meet the United Nations definition of political prisoner or prisoner of war are still held in U.S. prisons and jails. For a description of these individuals, their cases, and contact information please see <http://www.abcf.net/prisoner-contact-list>. This article strives to make the invisible men, women, and children standing solitary behind the walls of U.S. prisons visible. Once visible, it is our hope that they will no longer be ignored.

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