

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2013/02/16/voices-from-solitary-what-solitary-confinement-does-to-the-mind/>

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by [Voices from Solitary](#) | February 16, 2013



The following was submitted to Solitary Watch by Michael Jewell, who was sentenced to death in Texas for capital murder in 1970 and spent three years in solitary confinement as a death row prisoner. His sentence was commuted to life imprisonment in 1973 following the 1972 Supreme Court ruling in Furman v. Georgia, which prohibited the death penalty nationwide until the decision was overturned in 1976 in Gregg v. Georgia. Over the next 30 years, Jewell spent two two-year-long terms in Administrative Segregation. In Ad Seg, he would spend 23 hours a day in a 59 foot cell alone, allowed only a 20 minute shower and one hour of exercise in a cage. The first term was a result of his leading a work stoppage at Ellis Unit in Huntsville, Texas, in support of the Texas civil rights case Ruiz v. Estelle, which ultimately led federal courts to rule that the conditions in the Texas prison system violated 8th Amendment prohibitions against cruel and unusual punishment. His second term in solitary confinement was the result of an escape attempt at Ferguson Unit in Madison County.

Since his parole, he has found that life after prison is not easy. Hell, with my criminal history, I couldn't get a job as a speed bump at Krogers, he writes. If it were not for a loving wife with enough fixed income to support the both of us, no doubt I would have recidivated for something akin to throwing a brick through a bank window. Jewell has become active in prison reform with Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE), Amnesty International, the Texas Inmate Family Association, and the ACLU of Texas. With his wife, Joan, he founded Con-Care Services, which assists Texas inmates with problems prisoners routinely face, including visitation issues and appealing disciplinary cases. We don't move mountains but we kick the shit out of molehills, Sal Rodriguez

.....

I served 40 consecutive years on a life sentence in the Texas Department of Corrections, from 1970 to 2010. My first 3 years were on death row, which is much like Administrative Segregation and Solitary Confinement (S.C). I also did time in Ad Seg on two separate occasions, staying over two years each time. During that time I was confined to a 5 x 9 foot cell for 23 hours per day. I was allowed a 20 minute shower and an hour for outside recreation in a cage made of cyclone fencing, which resembled a cage you'd see at the dog pound. The cage measured about 10 x 10 square feet.

S.C. is a form of sensory deprivation, in that your perception shrinks to the dimensions of the space and sensations of confinement. Visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, and even the sense of taste are dramatically deprived and constricted. Almost immediately upon being tossed into isolation, though many people may not recognize it for what it is, you begin to suffer from a form of sensory withdrawal. Soon, you begin to crave the broader liberty you've lost, even the limited freedom of a prison's environment: the ability to move about and interact with other human beings. Such a radical deprivation of sensory perceptions has a numbing effect. You feel stunned.

Removed from the distractions and diversions of the broader context, the mind is suddenly forced to confront itself. You begin to hear yourself think. When the mind is withdrawn from the experience of perceiving and interacting with the complex activities of the broader environment, it is forced to switch to perceptions from within itself and draw upon self-consciousness, as well as the subconscious.

Sudden subjection to S.C. is a painful and dreaded experience. Because it is human nature to seek pleasure and avoid pain, we have a tendency to withdraw from the physical and take refuge into the psychological. Different people will have different reactions to this phenomenon. But most will indulge in various memories and forms of fancy. Alongside memories of good times come those of sad and

bad times. It is my opinion that all prisoners, deep inside, have a poor self-image. In S.C. that fact becomes acutely self-evident, or at least it did in my case. I suffered profound feelings of guilt and shame for past actions and inactions. Hot on the heels of regret come recrimination. Again, it is our nature to seek pleasure and to avoid pain. We tend to escape from over-awareness of our faults and foibles by turning to fancy. Over time: days, weeks, months, and years, imagination can verge on, and in many cases, into, hallucination. The next stage is often psychosis and irreparable psychological damage. Research has shown an irrefutable link between S.C. and mental deterioration:

Psychopathological reactions to S.C. were extensively described by nineteenth-century German clinicians. In the United States there have been several legal challenges to the use of S.C., based on allegations that it may have serious psychiatric consequences. The recent medical literature on this subject has been scarce. The author describes psychiatric symptoms that appeared in 14 inmates exposed to periods of increased social isolation and sensory restriction in S.C. and asserts that these symptoms form a major, clinically distinguishable psychiatric syndrome. (American Journal of Psychiatry).

S.C. is also a form of mental and physical torture. Reams of research on this aspect can be found by googling solitary confinement as torture. I was able to survive it as well as I did by reading. I read a small library of paperback psychology, yoga, meditation, self-hypnosis, and self-help books that I call rah rah books, Im getting better and better every day, better and better in every way! rah!, rah!, rah!

I think those most damaged by S.C. are the ones who try to outrun the ghosts and goblins of their past, but are caught and overwhelmed. I chased mine down and dealt with them. I developed a form of meditative self-analysis, that included self-induced age regression. I did so in order to exhume repressed memories of childhood traumas: *at age six sitting between separating parents asking me to choose which I wanted to live with, being sexually molested at seven, witnessing my father beat and stomp my mother before kindergarten*, etc. I was an exception to the rule: I came out better than I went in.

Finally, it should be said that the continuing existence of solitary confinement in our prisons is akin to allowing a smear of feces to stain every amendment to the U.S. Constitution. It makes us brethren of every nation our hypocritical politicians call violators of human rights. And to a more enlightened posterity, it will leave us draped in shame.

The Voices from Solitary series publishes dispatches from people surviving the lived experience of solitary confinement.

Accurate information and authentic storytelling can serve as powerful antidotes to ignorance and injustice. We have helped generate public awareness, mainstream media attention, and informed policymaking on what was once an invisible domestic human rights crisis.

Only with your support can we continue this groundbreaking work, shining light into the darkest corners of the U.S. criminal punishment system.

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 30, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 19, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 6, 2022

Solitary Watch encourages comments and welcomes a range of ideas, opinions, debates, and respectful disagreement. We do not allow name-calling, bullying, cursing, or personal attacks of any kind. Any embedded links should be to information relevant to the conversation. Comments that violate these guidelines will be removed, and repeat offenders will be blocked. Thank you for your cooperation.

Johnny Murray spent 27 years in S.C. in Texas prisons (until 2013). Hes going to be released from federal prison soon. He would love for you to contact him, Michael. His number is 02281-078.

I was arrested and put into what amounted to solitary confinement for a month while I waited on a court date in a tiny town in the country passing through I was stopped at an illegal roadblock. Solitary because I was the only female in the small town jail and the cell they put me in was a cell within an empty pod. I was fed twice a day that was the only person I saw was the staff 2x a day for about 1 minute. I also was not allowed outdoors at all for that month and there was no window/could see no sky. It rained really hard one time and being able to hear the rain outside really affected me and made me cry. I also broke into tears when they finally let me go into the yard after a month and I saw sun and felt and smelled fresh air. There was no TV or reading material except for the bible so I spent the first 2 weeks reading the bible and praying but then after about 2 weeks I believed God was communicating back to me through my thoughts and then through making my head shake and nod. When I asked if it was God he/it shook my head no and when I asked if it was Jesus it shook my head yes. I got really excited and thought Jesus was communicating directly to me and so I started a relationship and began communicating alot this way. But then things turned extremely dark and I began to receive or get disturbing visions and nightmares. I would stay awake at night I was so frightened of the nightmares and the mental attacks. It dawned on me that Jesus would not do this to me and so one day I asked if this was really Jesus and for the first time, I received no answer. I immediately stopped talking to it and then believed I had become demon possessed. I prayed like crazy just as I had from the beginning of my being there and also tried to exorcise myself and my cell. Nothing worked and I continued to see the visions and have my body and mind taken over and I could see clear-looking round or bug-like entities in my cell terrorizing me. I saw dark shadows and neon blue twinkles of light as well and no matter how much I prayed, these things would not go away until weeks later. When after a month some other women were brought in together on drug charges, the symptoms finally diminished. ive never had schizophrenia or any other mental disease but being in that jail by myself that way with no human contact or sunlight/fresh air damaged my mind in such a way that Im still haunted by

intrusive thoughts of my experience and symptoms going on 2 years later but the worst part is my suspicion now of spirituality. I feel I'll never be the same and there's nothing I can do about any more than I could do about it before. I would like to help with research about this and help others.

The most I've done in The HOLE was 5 months, and it was preferable to the day room full of monkeys at that county jail. As long as I have interesting people to corresponded with, it's not a problem at all to be alone.

Here two more schools that were built during the Long Depression which had similar results.

The Lyman School for Boys was established by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts about 1886 and was closed in 1971.

In November of 1943 at age 12 Albert DeSalvo was arrested for assault, battery and robbery. In December he was sent to the Lyman Reform School for boys.

The self-confessed Boston Strangler trapped dogs and cats in orange crates and watched the animals kill each other. He also shot arrows through the boxes.

<http://www.mrps.org/>

The Ohio State Reformatory (OSR), also known as the Mansfield Reformatory was built in 1896 and was the site of the movie Shawshank Redemption.

On July 21, 1948, former inmates Robert Daniels and John West were dubbed the Mad Dog Killers for a murder spree which included the superintendent of the OSR farm along with his family, a tavern owner, a farmer and a truck driver. West was killed in a shoot out with police and Daniels eventually died in the electric chair.

So much for rehabilitation although admittedly they might have had issues before this.

This is why I believe in order to resolve the log jam down stream we need to stop them from entering up stream.

Researching more could be a good term paper for the interns at Solitary Watch.

Nice work. Interesting and enlightening.

On the theme of boxing I thought you might enjoy this article on Bernard Hopkins.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/03/the-underappreciated-true-story-of-48-year-old-boxer-bernard-hopkins/273747/>

Bernard Humphrey Hopkins, Jr. was born in January 15, 1965 in Philadelphia. He grew up in perhaps the most crime-ridden projects in Philly. By the time he was 11, he was already into petty theft; within two years, he was mugging people and had been to the emergency room three times with stab wounds. He joined a gang and graduated to higher crimes. By the age of 18 he had accumulated a rap sheet longer than his left arm. In 1982, after racking up nine felonies, he was sent to Graterford Prison for 18 years.

As he once told a reporter for the Philadelphia Daily News, I saw worse stuff inside prison than I ever saw in the streets. I saw guys raped, beaten and tortured. When I saw a guy murdered for a lousy pack of cigarettes, something in me snapped. I knew that I had to be responsible for turning my own life around.

When Hopkins steps into the ring at Brooklyn's Barclays Center Saturday night there will be no real pressure on him. At age 48, the only possible record to beat would be his own, and if he loses he already has a burgeoning career as a promoter with a minority partnership with Oscar De La Hoya in Golden Boy Productions. And if he wins, who knows? Hopkins could become the first fighter ever to be his own promoter. Someone at the pre-match press conference jokingly suggested to him that, if he prevails, he stage his next fight at Graterford Prison. Yeah, replied Hopkins with a laugh. I may do that. Under those conditions, I wouldn't mind going back.

I boxed in the Air Force on the same team as Sugar Ray Leonard's brother. My chief competition was a man named Ernest Curtest. He knocked out Ken Norton twice when Norton fought as a Marine. I weighed 180lbs he was 250lb. It was my first sanctioned bout his 260th. With 237 wins by knockout. He never turned pro.

I walked out with a large mouse under my left eye and what looked like an x-ray of my teeth from all the bruising. When I went into the ring I had a sinus infection and had walked to the gym where the fight was held using a cane.

I was told I had to give the crowd their heavyweight match or never be part of the team. I was told to last a round which I did and was ahead on points. The truth is however I doubt if I could have held him off much longer. The man could keep the heavy bag parallel to the floor with one hand. So while I was booed by the crowd for boxing instead of standing toe to toe I felt good. My mother didn't raise no fool.

LOL

Yes of course that is why I wrote this damaged. Meaning as the three mentioned.

As to your observation, Of course not everyone is damaged, Thank God. I wonder if that is really true. If not greatly debilitated, I think all survivors of long-term confinement, as minors or adults, are damaged in some way. One legged individuals still manage to get where they need to go.

The New York House of Refuge was the first youth detention center in the United States. The building was located in Manhattan, New

York City, at Randalls Island.

The reformatory opened January 1, 1825, with six boys and three girls. Within a decade 1,678 inmates were admitted.

Two features distinguished the New York institution from its British antecedents.

First, children were committed for vagrancy in addition to petty crimes.

Second, children were sentenced or committed indefinitely; the House of Refuge exercised authority over inmates throughout their minority years.

During the nineteenth century most inmates were committed for vagrancy or petty theft.

A large part of an inmates daily schedule was devoted to supervised labor, which was regarded as beneficial to education and discipline. Inmate labor also supported operating expenses for the reformatory.

<http://solitarywatch.com/2012/12/30/voices-from-solitary-haunted-by-memorys-ghosts/#comment-11029>

I will give you two other famous cases of reform in two of other schools.

The first is a serial killer by the name of Carl Panzram who entered Minnesota State Training School in Red Wing at the age of 11.

As for the conditions at Red Wing at the turn of the last century I quote from a undated letter to Henry Lesser from Carl Panzram warts and all, Lustmord: The Writings and Artifacts of Murderers, p. 202, (1997), Brian King, ed. ISBN 096503240X

You know that I spent several years in one of those places [reform school] when I was a boy and the so called Training that I recieved while there is mainly the cause of my being the degenerate beast that I am today. I have thought about that system of Training young boys for all of my life and I know that the whole system is wrong. That system of beating goodness, religeon and Jesus into boys in the 99 times out of 100 has the direct opposite effect of taking all of the goodness, kindness and love out of them and then replacing those with hate, envy deciete, tyranny and every other kind of meanness there is.

Excerpts from The Walls of Red Wing article:

According to Panzram the three years he spent at Red Wing contributed mightily to his burgeoning criminal pathology. Upon admission to the institution, he recalls being strip-searched and rigorously queried about his sexual history. The guard, Panzram alleges, examined my penis and rectum, asking me if I had ever committed fornication or sodomy or I had ever had sodomy committed on me or if I had ever masturbated.

Panzram was deemed reformed and granted his release from Red Wing in 1905. I was reformed all right, Panzram later said. I had been taught by Christians how to be a hypocrite and I had learned more about stealing, lying, hating, burning and killing. I had learned that a boys penis could be used for something besides to urinate with and that a rectum could be used for other purposes.

The other is Caryl Chessman, the infamous Red Light Bandit, who spent two terms in Preston School of Industry.

While Chessman was held in San Quentin he penned several books most famously Cell 2455 Death Row which was an instant success.

I encourage everyone to read their stories, so google them if youre interested.

Of course not everyone is this damaged. Thank God.

@ Jewell

Greendale has a similar history as well.

It was also thought up in the 1890s. I read on the web that:

The Kentucky Legislature of 1898 made an appropriation of \$100,000 for the establishment of two schools of reform, one for girls and one for boys to be located in Greendale, KY.

Greendale was first known as the Kentucky House of Reform.

And as expected it has done a lot of damage to those that entered its gates.

<http://extras.denverpost.com/news/news0304b.htm>

March 4, 2001 No lawyer wants to represent Marvin Gayle Gray.

Perhaps its the menacing glare, the wrists that fit only in leg irons, the shaved head, the tattoos of skulls, swastikas and demons.

Perhaps its because he threatened to kill the last two men who stepped forward to defend him.

Or maybe its the violent words of Colorado prison inmate No. 43475.

The whole thing turns on satisfaction of taking a persons life. Its something that excites me, said the convicted murderer, who has confessed to killing 23 people.

When he turned 12, Gray was caught breaking into a courthouse and was sent to Kentucky Village, a reform school in Lexington.

It was there, Gray said, that he lost respect for authority and learned to hate.

He remembers the night guards watched as four kids raped a younger boy. Afterward, the guards ordered the boy to fight bigger kids so he could learn to defend himself.

You learn a lot of these tricks when you go to a place like that, psychologist Levy said. To survive, he had to suppress empathy for anybody else.

His rage, fearlessness and absence of inhibitions gave him stature, Gray said.

Another on a growing list of such reform schools that were created in the 1890s during the Long Depression.

Yes Mike I was hoping you would reply. And I think the sites managers welcome such personal accounts like this for a planned book. I find most of the stories written in these blog posts are like icebergs, what is visible is only a small fragment of the total mass.

I find the real story usually begins long before the SHU in the countries numerous juvenile faculties. The connection between California and the South is also not readily apparent. But as you might have read in The Grapes of Wrath, California received a lot of immigration from such areas as Oklahoma and Arkansas. In fact my grandfather was from the Ozarks of Arkansas. Many of these immigrants formed tight-knit communities in Southern California. These communities did not like outsiders and as new comers my older brother Mike and I often clashed with them. Maybe this is why I enjoy the series Justified as it deals with such communities in Kentucky where you seem to have lived.

You see Mike and I were Navy brats and as such we moved from one corner of the US to another. Seattle, Portland, Hunters Point San Francisco, New Egypt New Jersey, Baton Rouge, LA and Iowa.

Dont take this the wrong way because I have a lot of respect for you having survived all that has happened in your life. You seem to be a person I could sit down with and hold a conversation with. But I literally cut my teeth rolling in the dirt with white boys that, like you wrote above, enjoyed fighting. However for me it was counter to my nature. Once on the roll however they were in trouble.

I can remember one day encountering four siblings at the community pool. My older brother being half Jewish with jet black hair and a cocky attitude had attracted their attention. Suspecting him of being Mexican they cornered him. The youngest brother was my age (8) and the oldest was a bit older than Mike (11). Mike proclaimed that they were just lightweight punks that even his little brother could whip. A bet was made and after swimming all day we walked to an open field in our bare feet where Mike paused and explained the deal. I had to whip them all one at a time or he would kick my ass. I knew I couldnt win a fight with Mike so I reluctantly squared off with first one then another and when I barely finished off the third I refused to fight the oldest because hell I couldnt even lift my arms. So Mike slapped me in the back of my head and quickly dusted the oldest brother in a vicious barrage breaking the kids nose.

And so a pattern was established and while Mike later joined a Mexican Gang which lead to numerous clashes with the white clans I was caught in the middle. As Mikes brother I was targeted by these clans but having blue eyes and dirty blond hair I was rejected by most Mexicans. However my two best friends were Jose and Manual and my girl friends were also Mexican. This was something that could get you stabbed in the 1960s and in fact such inter-racial dating was the reason behind a stabbing of another white kid in my high school. By the time of my first bust at the age of 9 fighting was a knee jerk reaction. Although I always attempted to avoid fighting when I was cornered I punched until either they fell or we were separated. This essay of mine on this site begins when I was 10:

<http://solitarywatch.com/?s=Los+Angeles+Juvenile+Hall+1962>

In addition to these clans much of the LAPD was recruited from the south, mostly hard-nosed and ex-military. They brought with them a propensity for violence and the LAPD has since developed a well deserved reputation for brutality only matched in the south.

When their B & W vehicles pulled up my knees would literally buckle.

During my first CYA experience when I was 12 the counselors also paired us up in boxing matches but I did just enough to protect myself because I just didnt want to perform for them. I did the real fighting out of their view. This was the mildest thing they did to us. They were of the same mold as the LAPD.

I confirmed this observation during my trip down south in 1969 the same year the film Easy Rider was produced. The difference between the characters in the movie and me is that I lived through it.

@Michael Jewell

As my moniker implies I did time in the California Youth Authority, and as such I noted in Texas Tough that you were held in TYC facility in Gatesville.

Robert Perkinson, author of Texas Tough: wrote that Gatesville gained a reputation for ruthlessness as decades passed. Gatesville, which served as the main juvenile detention facility for Texas since its opening, had a focus on labor instead of rehabilitation.

Excerpt:

Michael Jewell a former Gatesville state school student who attended the school in 1961, said that long periods in solitary confinement, stoop labor, fights between gangs, beatings perpetrated by staff members, and sexual assault occurred at the facility.

So I looked Gatesvilles history up.

Gatesville opened in January 1889 with 68 boys who had previously been located in correctional facilities with adult felons in the Huntsville Unit.

The story is very similar for Preston School of Industry which opened on July 1, 1894 in Ione, CA and for its near identical twin the Minnesota State Training School in Red Wing, MN which opened in 1891.

It seems the country went on a building spree in the 1890s. Most of the better known inmates are a product of this type of juvenile school. And all three were modeled on existing facilities in the NE.

I was also 12 when I entered the CYA system and 17 when I arrived in Preston. Luckily my only direct experience in an adult facility was when I took a bus from Preston back down to L.A. for court. In the process we visited all the adult facilities in CA to pickup and drop off other prisoners. On this trip a hardened con reentering Folsom Prison paused with a tear in his eye and told me to not be a fool like he had been. The trip impressed me and with a whole lot of luck I never returned.

I checked out chapter 8 which deals with California's influence. The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement does a more in-depth look at this system.

CYA, I don't know if you expected a response from me or not, but your first sentence seems to address me, As my moniker implies I did time in the California Youth Authority, and as such I noted in Texas Tough that you were held in TYC facility in Gatesville.

I went to Gatesville in 1961, I was 14. I was on escape from Greendale, a reform school in Lexington, Kentucky at the time. After being processed in at the Reception Center I was told to take a shower and as I soaped up my face the supervisor hit me in the jaw with his fist and knocked me to the floor. He glared down at me and said, You little punk motherfucker, you try to run from here and Ill personally stomp a mud-hole in your ass! 58 days later I escaped and returned to Kentucky. By the time I returned to Texas I was 18. I was arrested for burglary and instead of returning to Gatesville I went to TDC with a five year sentence for burglary.

In 1961 Gatesville was about as brutal as reform schools get. There were no gangs as such, they were called cliques. Cliques consisted of home boys, from the various Texas cities. There were the Dallas Clique, Ft. Worth, Houston, San Antonio, Corpus Christi, etc. Because I was initially befriended by some guys from Ft. Worth I rode with the Ft. Worth clique. On weekends the staff, or bosses, organized fights between the various cliques. Each clique was represented by its toughest member, and we went through a sort of process of elimination. As insane as it may now seem, we were enthusiastically up for that shit. The cliques took great pride in their standing. These fights were called Rolling the Bones, bones referring to knuckles. The combatants wore leather work gloves that scarcely spared the flesh. The Ft. Worth clique was represented, during my short stay, by a guy named Ronnie Foreman. Ronnie was actually from Bay City, a suburb of Houston. Bay City was too small for a proper clique of its own, so Ronnie rode with Ft. Worth for the same reasons I did, he got along with its members. Ronnie had grown up in a sort of orphanage in Bay City that had a boxing program, and the kid could really roll the bones. Most weekends Ronnie was the last man standing, so to speak, Second at worst. It gave us a lot of prestige, and, made us a lot of cigarettes, as all fights were heavily bet upon, by inmates and bosses alike. When bosses who bet on us won a nice piece of change from their fellows, it was not uncommon for them to bring us a large bowl of venison chili and platter of jalapeno cornbread.

But least I paint too humane a portrait of the bosses, they were some vicious, brutal sonsofbitches. At the slightest provocation they were quick to use fists and feet in retribution. I could write for hours about good old Gatesville, but, alas, this is not the time nor place.

Below you'll find a link to a good source for the history behind civil death and this large-scale profit-based system of servitude.

<http://onthehuman.org/2011/08/when-felons-were-human/#sthash.Oy2Glsbv.dpuf>

Rebecca McLennan, points out in her essay When Felons Were Human :

criminal disfranchisement occurred first in Northern states where there were significant prison populations and where the overwhelming majority of prisoners were of the white laboring classes (and, subsequently, Irish and other immigrant populations, as well).

Civil death law facilitated the emergence of this large-scale profit-based system of servitude, giving it legal expression and new moral weight. Unlike in Europe, observed Alexis de Tocqueville in 1835, the lawbreaker in America was an enemy of the human race, and every human being is against him.

So accepted was the convicts' alien status by 1865, that the framers of the 13th Amendment un-controversially exempted convicts from the otherwise universal prohibition on slavery and involuntary servitude. Significantly, that amendment did not refer to the exempted class as prisoners; it referred to them as the party duly convicted of crime.

(You can get a feel for the politics behind this compromise in the new movie Lincoln.)

Resurrected over two centuries ago, in service of a novel form of legal punishment, the American doctrine of civil death helped lay the wide, straight road along which advocates of capital punishment, minimum mandatory sentencing, three strikes laws, and the less-than-fully-human status of prisoners have been able to advance quickly, and with lethal effect.

(The Southern States just continued their slave plantations with this new class of slaves.)

Readers who are interested in this train of thought may want to check out TEXAS TOUGH by Robert Perkinson, a scholarly and erudite treatise on the subject, available on Amazon.com

Several of the comments on here refer to TDCJ. I live in Canada and visit a friend in Livingston who has been in ad/seg for 18 years now. He escaped in 1994, and every since has lived in the 1012 windowless gray burnt out cell. In all these years he has never attempted another escape, and by their own policy that states: after 10 years be released by to gp. Providing he has no major cases, he is not a gang member. But feelings got hurt and people at the top were embarrassed. And the OIG was publically humiliated. He has been eligible for parole since 2005 and every 180 days the SCC arrive with their predetermined signed review, stamped remain in ad/seg.

It is so sad that so many University educated officials can determine that this is some form of rehabilitation.

All I can continue to do is write him and visit, buy him fruit from the vending machines (he hadn't had a banana in 18 years) a salad and

maybe a sandwich. And you betcha all of the food in the vending machine is over priced, but they know visitors will pay any price when it comes to see them. Many of the guys in there have never had a visitor or anyone that writes. They all need at least someone to write so they can at least have some connection to the outside world. No tv or phones only law library books. How do you ever get out?

Shirley, Being from Canada, a civilized and enlightened country, as opposed to the U.S., which still has one foot in the dark ages, you will never be able to comprehend the barbarism of our criminal justice system. Especially in Texas. You approach the subject using reason, logic, and compassion, attributes that are alien to the American mindset.

Bear in mind that the first Texas prison units were formerly slave plantations. And consider the fact that when the 13th amendment to our Constitution abolished slavery there was the all important exception of, except as a punishment for crime. the Virginia Supreme Court remarked in an 1871 case, *Ruffin v. Commonwealth*, that prisoners were slaves of the state, and for the most part that attitude prevails today. Correctional administrators are todays slavers. As difficult as it is for civilized nations to understand, prisoners, as slaves of the state, are held to be less than human. They are comparable to chattel, beasts of burden. How else can one reconcile with the barbaric treatment of American prisoners? Prolonged solitary confinement, starvation diets, lack of medical care, and the zealous use of capital punishment.

Though it wont do much to ease your discontent, you can at least better understand the draconian mentality of our prison administrators by putting them in their proper perspective: They are the progeny of plantationists.

bravowell stated.

I dont think enough background is given on the inmates so I like to fill in the blanks.

From Texas Tough.

<http://www.pen.org/robert-perkinson-texas-tough-rise-americas-prison-empire>

Michael Jewell, admits that he was a thug when he went to prison for capital murder in 1970. But that was almost forty years ago. As a twenty-two-year-old, Jewell shot and killed a store clerk. As an aging baby boomer, he works full time as an inventory clerk and spends long hours in his cell reading psychology books and practicing Buddhist meditation. He is a different man than the one jurors sent to prison, yet his fate is defined by a single act.

Even in 1970, Jewell was a more complicated individual than the killer sketched by prosecutors. Like so many defendants, his life had been shaped by violence. One of my first memories is fear, he explained in a letter. When he was a child, he came home from a movie with his sister one day to find his mother curled up on the floor against the bed. Towering over her was Michaels father, gripping her hair with one fist and pummeling her with the other. Another time, he proudly presented his father with a baby sparrow his brother had found. Drinking heavily with neighbors in the backyard, his father took the bird in his hand, stroked its back, and then popped its head off with his thumb. I watched my own innocence thrashing around and dying in the bloody dirt, Jewell said, looking back.

By the time Michael was eight, he was turning the violence he experienced at home outward. He remembered capturing and killing birds himself, whacking them with sticks. Soon he graduated to fistfights with other kids, then knife fights, then glue sniffing, and finally armed robbery. He went to reform school at the age of twelve and landed his first prison sentence at eighteen. It was after an escape that he murdered the store clerk. Jewell and his partner thought the man was going for a gun, but after they searched his slumped body, they realized he was just reaching down to hand them the night deposit bag.

Only in middle age did Jewell have the wherewithal to ask, What the hell happened? He does not know what turned him from an innocent little kid into a young man who fired a bullet into another mans chest, he says. But it wasnt that I was naturally cold-blooded. Prisoners in Texas, as elsewhere, share a great many characteristics. They tend to be poor, poorly educated, and non-white. They also tend to be young, heedless, and angry, at least for the first few years behind bars. When you sit down and talk to inmates about their lives, however, you soon discover is that what unites them most of all is great pain: pain that they have soaked up as victims and pain they have inflicted on others.

Mike Jewell wrote me that: Gang members sometimes went to breakfast at three in the morning and when they finished they would go to their intended victims dorm or cell block instead of their own. When the guard opened the doors they would rush in and murder their target.

This is a common theme of prison life. My own brother whose name is also Mike wrote me this letter long ago.

Dear Al

There may be worse things than being caught in the middle of a prison race riot, but frankly I cant think of one.

Time: March 28, 1967

Place: D.V.I. Tracy, Ca

Event: Riot

Excerpt:

Ready for breakfast, Lewis and I walk down the three flights of stairs of Cell Block A. We reach the bottom door and zip up the old Navy P coats given to us for winter, and step outside onto the compound. The walkway is covered with slimy pigeon shit, frozen over in the winter-morning dew. But were less worried about slipping and sliding on the frozen slime than we are with what may lay waiting in the shadows and corners that we have to pass to get to the Mainline cafeteria.

There exist two and only two types of riots in prison: One is literally spontaneous erupting over the smallest of incidents and spreading like wildfire. The second, more serious and deadly is slow and calculated and includes well-planned physical and sexual assaults. The impending riot promises to be one of the latter.

As best we can, we keep our heads down against the cold Northern California winter wind, at the same time staying alert to danger, yet never making eye contact with anyone we dont know or are not on speaking terms with. The wrong gesture, no matter how unintentional, or stare held too long, if not provoking, immediate reprisal, will most assuredly be accounted for if and when it finally comes down.

The cafeteria is already half full and it isnt because of the great cuisine and atmosphere: Its dangerous to lie in your bunk after the doors are racked open.

And Ex-Black Panther Eddie G. Griffin wrote on his blog:

My counter-part was Raymond Smith-el, a Moorish Science of America gladiator, known as the Sword of Justice, street named Cadillac.

Cadillac laughed. He always laughed in the face of his enemies. And, there were times when his psychotic laughter caused even me to quiver. To hear him laugh was not good, not good at all for somebody.

And, on a good day, his signature battle cry would rattle the walls and shake all the prison cages. No wonder, men in prison feared him, both inmate and guard.

It was said of the Moors in prison that they could kill a man, stash the weapons where no one on earth could find them, wash their clothes and dry them, before prison officials could ever discover the body.
Griffin also wrote of Cadillac we both trained for combat in the same prison cage.
Keep in mind while reading the following story, written by Griffin, that Robert Marvin Chappelle was also a convicted killer and the best friend of Smith.
Excerpts:

They called him Casper, because he had killed 10 men in Atlanta Federal Prison.

Nobody ever saw him. He left no evidence, other than the slit throat of his victims. Over a period of years, during the 1970s, the FBI never caught him. That is how he got the nickname Casper, the Unfriendly Ghost.

Strange that we would become friends and he would become one of my trainers a man with a claw for a hand, a convicted murderer.

He had a killers instinct and the thirst for it.

In this story Griffin also writes he was attacked by Casper well he slept but managed to survive and develop an uneasy friendship with the character.

Ironically Chappelle was also later strangled to death while lying on his bunk in Marion Prison.

One last excerpt from War Behind Walls by Edward Bunker published in Harpers Magazine Feb. 1972:

.four white convicts rushed from the North cellblock, carrying a man on a litter. A guard ran along beside them. As the retinue crossed through the white crowd, convicts walked alongside and asked what had happened. The wounded man had been napping in his cell (doors in the North cellblock are left unlocked) and one or two blacks stabbed him while he slept. He didnt know who they were. Hed been selected because he was white and asleep The white whod been stabbed was just an average convict, not someone special. Trouble might have subsided if that had been it.

No wonder there is so much hostility no one sleeps well.

Thank you so much for sharing your story. And thank you to everyone for the illuminating comments. Ive learned a lot here. I just discovered this website and will be sure to continue to read and share.

In solidarity, Kimberly

I well understand the intent of the article and use of metaphors in writing. A successful transition from incarceration to freedom is not magical. Parole and reintegration must be intentional. Theres no room for excuses. An investment in victimization creates a foothold for failure. That was my point.

Thanks Mike I also enjoy Jorges writings.

Was your paranoia been behind your escape attempt? Ive always said prisoners are like tethered animals in a slaughter house.

I never ran with a click on the inside nor on the streets but I was willing to mix it up if the need arose and it often did.

I listened to a lot of horror stories about all the prison farms in the south while I was held in Baton Rouges still segregated Parish Jail in the fall of 1969 through the spring of 1970. I came to believe that prison is a cruel gauntlet with one side lined with rouge guards and the other with predatory inmates. These two adversarial groups, consciously or unconsciously, have colluded together to met out societys punishment.

If one is lucky they will reemerge on the other side with a new appreciation of what it takes to do your time in the middle.

Ive often written on here that during the 1960s in Californias prisons the racial violence increased exponentially over the control of the yard. The violence was mostly fueled by the rhetoric of race baiting false prophets on all sides and the fires of hatred burned bright. Centuries of resentment and rage was released. The warriors, mostly uneducated and pliable, demanded bloody revenge with every drop of their own blood that was spilt warranted or not, in a vicious circular cycle. With the tacit support of a fifth column of rouge guards the war at first raged on mostly unabated for a number of years. Divide and conquer was, and still is, the guards modus operandi based on its historic use by the elite of our nation from its inception, first by class, then by race.

By the time the Summer of Love arrived in 1967 every peaceful flower child that was incarcerated had a cross to bear. As he walked bound in his chains through the cruel gantlet which is prison, sadistic guards on one side, and leering sexual predators on the other, he may have paused with a tear in his eye, to gaze at the sky beyond the ominous watchtowers, to ask Why has thou forsaken me?

After the Soledad Incident of January 13, 1970 the guards themselves became targets and so they quickly called for the isolation of gang ring leaders. The California Corrections Officer Association, CCOA, demands for Secure Housing Units fell on the sympathetic ears of the prison administrators and congress so steps were taken to build them. The tactic spread rapidly across the country leading to the current crisis where tens of thousands are held for years, many for decades, within concrete tombs designed for maximum sensory deprivation. But the violence did not stop.

This is not surprising when you keep in mind that much of the violence in our prisons, now as in the past, is perpetrated by uncontrolled gangs of guards.

I hope you can help those that follow you. Good luck!

Wow, Michael, you not only survived this ordeal, now youre thriving. I hope youve patted yourself on the back a few times at least! This was a difficult article to read, I was so unaware of this, although I foolishly pride myself on keeping on top of things!

And you certainly have the writers voice, a very useful tool in this situation.

God Bless you and your family, and all of those you help.

This has to stay in the public eye.

I just want to add that these articles are terribly important, and that I am deeply grateful for the courage it takes to write them. I will always do my part to keep this info public, and to educate others on NOT making negative assumptions about ex-cons, and not to think that ANYONE deserves the awful treatment that has become commonplace outside of the public eye. I hope others will actively do the same. Thanks for sharing your experiences! Im so sorry for you having to have them. My heart goes out to you all.

I wonder why people dont realize that at least half of new inmates are innocent of any crime, and were railroaded into plea bargains. This means, well, you know what it means. Or you probably will, sooner than you think.

I think he was making a point by that brick comment, that it is really hard to get back into society after being in jail/isolated and that he was really blessed to have his wife and the healing he got through self help books.

Maybe people need to be taught meditation, in prison. In my own times of isolation, due to illness or social rejection, meditation, which is basically what you describe, helped me a lot, to love myself and know that we are still worth something, even if others are not always around us. It is really sad that something clinically shown to make problems worse is still being used. The effects are not generally known, though, so I hope you will keep educating people about it and that it gets stopped.

I saw a show about yoga/meditation taught in a prison. Inmates talked about how much better they could handle their feelings, and how much more peace they felt.

Theres also something called TRE, by Dr. David Berceli: Trauma Releasing Exercises. They help the body release trauma, by inducing shaking in the body. People around the world, in war zones, and everywhere else, get relief from it. That could help too.

God bless.

This man proves the role luck plays in our lives.

First he is lucky to have beat the death chamber, and then the perils of the Texas prison system.

But he is equally lucky to have the former president of the Dallas, Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) as a supporting wife.

It is hard enough now days for the ordinary citizen his age to land a job at a living wage let alone an ex-con.

People change as is visually evident by his photos on CURE. The cute little kid turns into a tough looking young man and then into a average senior citizen like myself.

<http://www.concareservices.com/gallery.html>

Mike I was wondering if you know Jorge Renaud and how your experience in the Texas system compares to his story below?

http://www.utexas.edu/know/2010/11/22/renaud_jorge/

Alan CYA # 65085 asked if I know Jorge Renaud. Yes, Im proud to say I do. I admired him inside when he was associate editor of the Echo, the prison newspaper. The paper was censored before him, and has returned to the same since he left. He wrote courageously about things that mattered, and was ultimately fired for it. He went on to write a book and numerous newspaper and magazine articles while still incarcerated. When he left prison he got a degree in social work and worked as an intern with the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition. We didnt meet until we began attending some of the same workshops, and groups I belong to began networking with groups he belongs to. He has a sincere passion for bringing about prison reform and for helping ex-offenders reintegrate into society.

The violent conditions he writes about were akin to a living nightmare. Two white supremacist gangs tried to prospect (recruit) me more than once. Gang members were known to viciously murder those who refused them. I became so paranoid at one point that I slept with rice krispies strewn on the floor so that I could hear anyone who tried to creep into my cell. Gang members sometimes went to breakfast at three in the morning and when they finished they would go to their intended victims dorm or cell block instead of their own. When the guard opened the doors they would rush in and murder their target. A few times they did it quietly enough to get away with it. After the hit they just waited until the guard opened the doors again for some work detail or pill call and they could slip out. Usually they were caught, but they didnt care, they mindlessly did what they were ordered to do. Otherwise, a hit would be put on them.

You sound like a success story truly an inspiration that proves wrong the old cliché..you cant fight city hall. You, sir, sound as if you did, indeed, do just that. You walked through that hell and came out with dignity intact. You deserve a medal Im sure, though, you have your scars. Your statement about self-meditation and refocusing and reframing the past speaks to the kind of person you are and certainly is one of the reasons you survived and did not recidivate. You have a lot to be proud of Mr. Jewell. Keep up the good work continue to fight the good fight. -Lori

Michael, thank you so much for this stark and honest depiction of what this really is. I am very happy to hear you are working with others who need your help, and Im grateful you survived the torture that is solitary confinement. I hope you continue to speak out and educate people.

For what its worth- I understood you Michael- never thought you meant a brick for real- the person who doesnt get that to me is the one that might do it- congrats to you and how awful for you to go through that- Ive gone through much isolation but not that- you write so well about it- I could feel it and it was very real the best to you great work

Tim, I dont know if Im reading you correctly, but the brick was never an option for me either. Maybe you should read what I wrote a few

more times.

Hell, with my criminal history, I couldn't get a job as a speed bump at Krogers, he writes. If it were not for a loving wife with enough fixed income to support the both of us, no doubt I would have recidivated for something akin to throwing a brick through a bank window.

All the guys with that attitude in the 3/4 house I was in for transition are back in the joint for violating parole or for picking up a new case. As a returning citizen blessed with a support network, they helped to keep things focused and intentional. Yeah, being locked up sucks major ass. No doubt about that. Remaining victimized is not congruent to moving on.

No matter how tough things were, throwing a brick through a bank window was never an option for this ex-offender.

Someone please tell me how I can help to end this inhumane torture. It has to stop!

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