

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [Voices from Solitary](#) | August 8, 2012

The following was written by M.O., who has been incarcerated since 1994. He has been in isolation units for over 17 years in Oregon, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. In this piece, M.O. discusses his involvement in white supremacist gangs in Oregon. He writes of the development of Aryan prison gangs in Oregon during the 1990s and the role that isolation units played in fostering racism and violence. He also writes of his experience leaving the gang he was involved in and reflects on his prolonged incarceration and isolation. Sal Rodriguez

I have been incarcerated continuously since September 1994. When I first came to prison Oregon did not have any firmly established prison gangs. We had a variety of street gangs: skinheads, Crips, Bloods, Southsiders and Northsiders. None were overtly violent. Crips walked the yard with their rivals as did all the street gangs. There were no Wars inside the prison like other states, such as California, were having. Friendships and loyalties were based largely on the county or town someone came from.

In 1994 there were only about 8000 prisoners, men and women, in Oregon prisons. In 1995 a state elected representative, Kevin Mannix, pushed for and got passed a law that became known as Measure 11. Measure 11 permitted the state to charge first time offenders as young as 15 with crimes carrying mandatory minimums without good time. Within a decade the prison population ballooned to more than 14,000.

I arrived at an Oregon prison in December 1995 with a life sentence. I would become eligible to parole in September 2014. All the Measure 11 cases had not yet started filling the prisons. It was my first arrest and criminal conviction. I had grown up in a lower middle class family. A close knit Irish family. I had never seen a gang member growing up, unless you counted the wannabes who popped up after watching Colors.



The first gang member I met was Kyle Brewster, a skinhead who was a founding member of the white supremacist skinhead group East Side White Pride (ESWP). Brewster, like me, grew up in a middle class family after he and other members of ESWP killed an Ethiopian student. It was a case that was internationally known. Brewster was a popular white prisoner and ESWP had gone from being a street gang to Oregon's first white prison gang.

Brewster immediately took me under his wing. He taught me and told me things I had never heard before. I learned about Jews, Zionists, racialism and the various racist groups. He told me the right books to read and how to read between the lines of the newspapers. He had planted the seeds of racist ideology. I had never considered racism before and had girlfriends who were mixed race. My oldest daughter was a roll numbered Native American. What he taught me was I was brainwashed into being a race traitor and now that I knew right from wrong I could act differently.

At the same time my cellie, a person who had done more than 30 years in state and federal prisons had begun schooling me on the convict code. I quickly adopted the prison lifestyle. I was 20 years old and impressionable. They gave me something I had never felt

before: identity. It was the first time I found something to be proud of and something to live for that, at the time, was greater than myself. I began seeing prison officials as the enemy.

I took to extortion, assaults, and stabbings quickly. The prison was not violent but I learned quickly that violence produced fear and power. My behavior kept me locked down in the newly vuil Intensive Management Unit (IMU), a supermax unit holding the so-called worst of the worst. It was in IMU and being moved from prison to prison I learned the art of prison politics. Thanks to Brewster I had developed an ideology. But IMU and its isolation has a haunting way of distorting a persons reality even more. It was a corrosive environment that contributed to psychological decline and extremist thinking.

Back then supermax units were becoming a trend in the US and there was not a lot known about the psychological impact of those type of units (today there is a website dedicated to it: Solitary Watch). In Oregon it became a toxic cocktail that would lead to four of Oregons most notorious white supremacist gangs to form and grow. ESWP would become a faded memory and as Measure 11 filled the prisons with younger and younger first time offenders those new gangs would quickly grow to a violent culture. A culture that would spread from the prison walls and into the streets resulting in average citizens being slaughtered.

The first group, Aryan Death Squad was formed by a few IMU prisoners. It had no real goals but violence against prisoners and staff. The second group, Aryan Soldiers, was silimilarly formed by IMU prisoners. The last, the European Kindred, was a less violent group concerned more with protection because of their fear of other prison gangs.

I was a member of the Aryan Soldiers. They were inspired by the violent acts of Aryan Brotherhood killings which were part of prison lore. They were also inspired by groups such as the Silent Brotherhood, a 1980s white terrorist group. The group was formed by Orin Williams, David Pedersen and a third prisoner who was expelled later. Williams and Pedersen would become my closest friends. Prospective recruits would have to do the minimum of a stabbing to be considered for membership. Our goal was to recruit in prisons to send people back out into the free world to pick up where the Silent Brotherhood (also called The Order) left off.

By 2006, my mother was dying from cancer, my kids were growing up and I didnt even know them, prison authorities were keeping Aryan Soldiers members in isolation. My moms cancer and my daughters gave me the greatest pause. I had gone so far from who I really was that the identity I had adopted was nothing like who I was.

I had a choice to make. I could continuedown that path and live and die by the sword or I could drop it and get back to being a human being. Prison had become all I knew. I also had many more years to do. I had been in prison since I was 19. I had gone so far wrong, even I didnt think it was possible to change. What I did next would seal my fate.

When I told Williams I was done with AS and racism it didnt take long for a vote to be held by my former friends. It was decided my life was forfeit. And so it stands.

Walking away as the best decision I ever made. I felt a sense of peace. It came at a cost, but I gained my sanity back. In May 2007, Oregon transferred me to Oklahoma and then in August 2010 to New Mexico. My decision to change my life was not lost on people. A large part of prison officials didnt believe it. I dont blame them. A lot of guys want to change, say they are going to change, but end up going back to their old ways. I knew it would be a one way path. There could be no slips. No going back.

I have done more than 17 years in supermax isolation. I know all too well the psychological damage it causes. I have nightmares and was diagnosed with PTSD. When the military sends soldiers off to war and the come back with PTSD society bends over backwards to get them help. U.S. prisons are daily doses of war. Except some of us spend decades in that state of war. Sometimes Im scared of the thought of leaving prisonif I ever do. After decades of living in war how do you learn to function again in society when society does everything to marginalize you? There wont be anyone bending over backwards to help me. No matter how much Ive changed.

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

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I was friends with Kyle Brewster, and he was brainwashed as well. He had renounced all, distanced himself. Then along came Metzger to work him over once again. He was a leader back then, an inspiration & an utter disappointment. He does NOT retain the same beliefs

after prison. Skinheads suck.

I was recently incarcerated with orin williams I listened to his rhetoric, was not impressed, but found as more and more time passed his and my paths collided. I had made a major ethics violation and orin stood up 4 me. I look act white and I know how 2 survive. He acts and talks with no racist wording used. by the way I am Italian he still did not care. Every prison is run by guards all racism is propagated by them.

Solitary confinement is the most humane way of isolating violent gang members from the general prison population. Nobody wants to get stabbed.

I was incarcerated with this orin Williams. We talked a lot and I personally know he is not a racist!!! I gathered that on the west coast in prison you have to stick with people of your own race to survive.. I am white, 33, male I am getting married to a beautiful Puerto Rican woman and orin supports that. He has never called me a race traitor. .. dont believe that on-demand about him.. he is a great person to have as a friend..!!!!

I wish I was a computer whiz I would try to organize all of us with loved ones with inmates that are in prison to sue congress with the help of the ACLU if we all donated \$25, 50 and sued and charged either congress or the prison (where our loved one is at) with cruel and unusual punishment. I know I want my loved one returned the way they were or better. They are collecting all this money and making our loved ones worse it is NOT RIGHT!!! I am held responsible for my work at work-WHY arent they??????? I would be willing to work together, better yet FAMM.org is the best please lets solve this problem!!!!!!!!!!!!!! It has been going on for 40 years enough is enough!!!!!!!!!!

We should not waste one more minute to end this madness. I blame Congress they are the ones that make these insane laws. Its cruel and unusual punishment. When will Congress admit we cannot let this insanity go on anymore. If just one of them were to spend just one month in solitary or just plain prison these laws would change. This is so WRONG!!!!!!!!!! Fix it NOW.

Mary Topness, I could not have stated my passion any better. So with you, in solidarity to rid solitary, whatever I can do

thank you for sharing your stories about life behind the walls. I write to those behind the walls for 19 years now and a lot of them never want to come out. and that is alright with me. I still am their pen pal and that will not change. But they have also took another path and found new life in Jesus Christ, he helps them with the nightmares and gives them peace. I pray that you too will find Jesus Christ for you life. All you have to do is say Jesus come into my heart be my Lord and savior of my life and take away these night mares and give me you peace, love and grace and forgive me of all the wrongs I did in my life. amen.

God Bless you. Sister Denise our ministry is Jesus Prayer Ministry, PO Box 7925, Chula Vista, Ca. 91912 write me and I will write you back.

As always, a very well done piece that should be shared widely and read by the public, and as many people it can reach. Incorporating these solid, real-life thought-provoking accounts into courses for college students studying CJ from the other side would also be an excellent idea and possible edge for future change. I recently took a graduate course in Rehabilitation of the Offender which surprisingly enough looked into the success or failure of institutional programs and analytically took a look at what works and what does not work. The information gathered there gave only a glimpse of insight into the psychological factors of confinement. Solitary confinement of course, was not covered nearly widely enough. Voices from the other side should be a greater part of this kind of education, especially if the desired outcome is that people entering into the field maintain compassion for those around them. We must keep humanity alive yet realize the indifferent people-for-profit machine we are up against. Keep up the great work Solitary Watch, and all of those people who keep the awareness going. Namaste.

Not having the written skills of these two I would just like to use their words.

Remembering our time of total commitment to a set of dogmas that we now find pathetic, we tend to wear wry smiles. Perhaps it is not too much to say that in these violent times the kindest, wisest wish we have for the young must be: We hope that your period of immersion in group lunacy, group self-righteousness, will not coincide with some period of your country's history when you can put your murderous and stupid ideas into practice. If you are lucky, you will emerge much enlarged by your experience of what you are capable of in the way of bigotry and intolerance. You will understand absolutely how sane people, in periods of public insanity, can murder, destroy, lie, swear black is white.

Prisons We Choose to Live Inside by Doris Lessing.

We are all familiar with what I'll call the identity reflex we can all hear the call of some tribe or another. We humans are a variegated lot differing by race, ethnicity, cultural heritage, religion, political or sexual orientation This is, of course, as it should be. Diversity is a good thing.

Still, I am here to tell you that there are times when the call of the tribe just might be a sirens call, and when an excessive focus on identity just might lead one badly astray.

One comes to the university to learn how to think, to gain an awareness of the central questions with which reflective people have struggled over the centuries, and to develop an appreciation for how elusive the answers to such questions can be.

The particular features of one's social condition, the external givens, merely set the stage of one's life. They do not provide a script. That script must be internally generated; it must be a product of a reflective deliberation about the meaning of this existence for which no political or ethnic program could ever substitute.

In A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man James Joyce says this about Irish nationalism:

When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by these nets. Do you know what Ireland is? Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow.

Wearing one's racial identity too heavily can work similarly to hold back young souls from flight into the open skies of American society

or so, at least, it seems to me. Of course there is the constraint of racism that also holds us back. But the trick, as Joyce knew, is to turn such nets into wings, and thus to fly by them. One cannot do that if one refuses to see that ultimately it is neither external constraint nor external opportunity, but rather an in-dwelling spirit, which renders such flight possible.

Glenn Loury taken from his commencement speech

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