

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2020/04/29/voices-from-solitary-message-from-a-solitary-confinement-survivor-for-people-under-self-quarantine/>

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by [Voices from Solitary](#) | April 29, 2020

Mwalimu S. Shakur was in Pelican Bay State Prisons notorious Security Housing Unit in 2013, when tens of thousands of people incarcerated throughout California launched a mass hunger strike. He and others were protesting the policies of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) around indefinite isolation in solitary confinement (also known as indeterminate sentences). The strike lasted nearly 60 days and ended only after state lawmakers promised to hold hearings around the issue.

Shakur spent nearly three more years in the Security Housing Unit after the strike ended. In March 2016, he was released into general population, but his relative freedom was short-lived. A few months later, he was returned to the Security Housing Unit at Corcoran after someone told officers that he felt unsafe with Shakur on the yard. In 2018, Shakur wrote about [his brief stay in general population and the changes \(and lack of changes\) in SHU conditions upon his return](#).

Shakur has since been released from the SHU and is now in general population again. As people across the country grapple with shelter-in-place, social and physical distancing, and self-quarantine, he shared his recommendations on how to get through these isolating times.

He welcomes letters from readers at: Mwalimu S. Shakur/n Terrance E. White, #AG8738, CSP-Corcoran, 3A-01-130, PO Box 3461, Corcoran, CA 93212.

Victoria Law

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I know this virus has the world in an uproar, but please don't panic. The main thing is that you stay calm and pay attention to all the key facts of how to avoid catching it.

What I and others who were held in long-term isolation (the worst part of prison) learned was how to turn our cells into laboratories equipped with a library we put together that had a vast array of knowledge ranging from all subjects common to the science and arts most people don't learn about. We studied economics and broke down the capitalist system to see that socialism is a much better economic system for the poor because the goods are shared, and we studied all cultures history. You can clearly see the similarities in the practices. We studied politics, law, military history, psychology, theology, and philosophy, just to name a few, and what we learned allowed us to have a better understanding of the world and why it is the way that it is.

Finding ways to keep busy isn't hard to do. You just have to be creative and you can find little projects that will keep you occupied in a positive way. Take advantage of the social media platforms and Skype where you can form study cells and/or a think tank where you can dialogue about different ways to organize a food bank or a COVID-19 hotline for people to call in, if only to hear a positive solution to their problems. This will bring a real strong united front where you all can put your resources together and really make a difference in your life and in the lives of others. People coming together in times of crises really shows the 1% class what the 99% is made of. Resiliency! I believe we are our own problem solvers. I know you can do it together. You all are forever in my thoughts and prayers.

Banner Photo: Corridor at Pelican Bay State Prison, by Julie Small, KPCC.

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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Thank you for sharing. The best way to make changes is speaking out. Informing.

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