

Center For Constitutional Rights

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://ccrjustice.org/home/blog/2017/05/23/90-days-darkness-no-running-water-naked-no-blankets>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

The CCR blog

To mark the 23rd of the month, invoking the 23 hours per day that prisoners spend isolated in special housing units, activists throughout California are taking action to bring attention to prison conditions. Below, Abdul Olugbala Shakur (aka James Harvey), a class member in [Ashker v. Governor of California](#), shares his experience of being released into the general prison population after years in solitary confinement, following a settlement in the case that effectively ended long-term solitary confinement in CA prisons.

Over 30 years ago I was placed in the dungeon cell in the infamous Adjustment Center (San Quentin State Prison). Over 90 days of complete darkness, no running water, butt naked, no mattress/blankets and sheets, with cold air blowing from the vent, not to mention the constant company of the roaches and rats. This was both my introduction and initiation into the sarcophagus vortex of solitary confinement and isolation.

Thirty-two years fighting the demons conjured up by a tormented mind, contorting within the confines of a man-made hell, a concrete hell that is designed to suffocate the spirit and paralyze the mind. Twenty-five of those 32 years were spent in the notorious Pelikkan Bay State Prison, where it is easy to forget what the sun looks and feels like, even the moon and stars become distant memories. One even forgets what it feels like to walk on dirt and grass, let alone touch it with our hands. After so many years of sensory deprivation, it becomes easy to make friends with the critters that stalk our concrete coffins in search of their own humanity in an artificial world not of their making.

On 10.20.2015, I was released from solitary confinement into general population. Initially, I was a little startled by how many of the brothas actually knew of me, many of them read many of my writings, some of them (the much older prisoners) were aware of my story, e.g. I spent the longest time in the dungeon cells (with the exception of George Jackson and Hugo Pinnel) and that I was the most censored prisoner in the CDCR. But truthfully, this collective recognition and the accolades fell upon a numbed consciousness, impeding my capacity to fully appreciate the respect and love that was being displayed.

People, as an imprisoned activist, my perspective on our release from solitary confinement/isolation is much different than the vast majority of the other prisoners released. Before there was a Pelikkan Bay State Prison, hunger strikes, and the [Ashker settlement](#), I was very active in the struggle. Both my placement and retention in solitary was political.

Initially, I wanted to use this blog as a medium to articulate the diabolical anatomy of torture, but I asked myself: How can I/we articulate the ills/evils of torture/solitary confinement in a post-9/11 society, a society that has been oriented to accept torture as a necessary evil in the war against terrorism? Because of this, I decided to convey a message that I hope will resonate with all who read this blog, and that message is live for humanity/die for humanity.

Though I believe every prisoner that served decades in solitary confinement is entitled to enjoy whatever pleasures that was unjustly deprived from them, as a New Afrikan activist and political prisoner, the only deprived pleasures that I seek are not for self but for all poor and oppressed people, and that is **FREEDOM, JUSTICE, AND EQUALITY!**

Truthfully, I am a little disappointed, because a number of prisoners (not the New Afrikan prisoner activists) have gotten out here and returned to the same self-destructive behaviors, especially the use of drugs and alcohol. Our family, our attorney team and all the supporters across the country did not sacrifice their time, energy, resources and sanity so we can get out of here and engage in activities that only empower the Prison Industrial Slave Complex with the propaganda to justify locking us back up. We owe it to our family and supporters to be living examples of humanity's imprisoned soldiers.

People, our struggle continues. Last year the city of Chicago had 763 homicides, our communities are crying out for help, and we can resolve this crisis without depending on the Prison Industrial Slave Complex. People, your continued support is imperative to our success.

I recalled when I was asked, How did I survive 32 years in the hole/solitary confinement??? my life is dedicated to helping the oppressed, it does not belong to me, it belongs to the people. I suffer so they won't have to suffer. My 32 years of torture is a testament to my love for humanity, and without sacrifice there is no humanity. Let the children of the world be our motivation. I now bid you peace and unconditional love!

Your Beloved Brotha,

Abdul Olugbala Shakur

(aka: James Harvey)

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