

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2014/10/16/voices-from-solitary-freedom-shares-my-cell/>

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by [Voices from Solitary](#) | October 16, 2014

*The following story comes from Mustafa Zulu, who has been in solitary confinement for most of the past 22 years. He was born and raised in Washington, DC, where he watched both parents struggle with drug addiction. At the age of 16, he was tried as an adult and convicted of murder. He is currently serving a 50+ year sentence at the federal supermax prison in Florence, Colorado. The following comes from a longer autobiographical piece called Raised by Wolves. He can be reached by writing Mustafa S.F. Zulu, #06454-041, US Penitentiary Ad Max, PO Box 8500, Florence, CO 81226. Lauren Denitzio*

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My life of solitary confinement begins the first day I enter the jail in 1993. Because its a jail for adults, all juveniles were segregated and locked down most of the time while awaiting trial. At 18, I was sent to a prison in Lorton, VA where I was locked down 23 hours a day. Soon I was transferred to the BOP where they sent me to Terre Haute penitentiary in Indiana. I stayed there for six months, where for the first and last time I was in general population.

In 1996, at the age of 19 years old, I was sent to the federal supermax prison here in Florence, Colorado, known as ADX or the new Alcatraz of the Rockies. I was sent here nearly 20 years ago for an assault on an inmate. Back then the BOP did not have in place proper evaluations to determine if an inmate was suitable to be housed in solitary confinement, such as psychological evaluations etc. which they have now put in place as the result of major law suits. By all measures a 19 year old teenager was and should never be sent to Americas most secure federal supermax prison, where they boast of housing the so-called worst of the worst.

But I can tell you first hand, that its not only the worst of the worst here. Theres also some of the best here, the smartest, strongest, courageous and undefeated men from every class and race. I know, I was raised by some of these so-called wolves.

The hot-tempered teenager I arrived here as nearly two decades ago, who was more schooled in crime than in scholarship and barely literate, is a man now. You could immediately make the logical assumption that throwing me to the wolves or placing me in a University of Crime (ADX), that it would only serve to produce a more calculating criminal. Well, youd be both right and wrong.

If like myself, one sets out on a path to better themselves that is certainly possible too no thanks to the BOP and their overemphasis on punishment instead of rehabilitation programs.

Today Im a better person because of my faith, friendships, and self-determination. There was a few of these so-called worst of the worst who was the first to take notice of how young I was and my desire to better myself despite my circumstances. Some of these men have become my mentors, fathers, I never had. They opened my mind to a fascinating world of books where I could welcome into my cell some of the greatest minds in history. I still love most of all to sit in my cell and converse with the ideas of the great minds. The knowledge, virtues and disciplines Ive learned are my most treasured possessions. History, religion, languages, mathematics, and politics are some of the subjects Ive excelled at.

I can now only dream of the difference it wouldve made in my life to be given the type of guidance Ive learned in prison as a child. What I couldve accomplished and contributed to society? What if America valued its youth in urban communities enough to build more schools and factories instead of building more prisons or offshoring jobs to take advantage of cheap labor overseas.

In the ghettos where a lot of youth spend most of their time surviving, we are hardly ever exposed to any gratification of the spirit, art, poetry, philosophy and other civilizing influences. Our development are arrested long before we enter the gates of prison.

Lastly, one should never assume that because Ive used my time wisely to embetter myself, that solitary confinement are anything but places where the human soul is tortured. There is no question that after 20 years solitary confinement has negatively and adversely impacted my mental and emotional well-being and has led to a deterioration of mind and spirit.

Solitary confinement has a cruel way of slowly destroying the logical process of the mind. Ive witnessed too many friends of mine who was perfectly sane one day, go completely insane the next day! I could never feel secure that this will not happen to me because I work

to embetter myself. No, it dont work that way. This place either destroys you entirely or makes you stronger, but nobody, and I mean nobody, who does an extended stay at the Alcatraz of the Rockies leave here unscathed.

Freedom shares my cell,  
Because my mind roams over these walls

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.

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there are more articles by Mustafa Zulu on this facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Live-from-Supermax-Florence/528182013984286>

Here is a person who needs to receive good books and intellectual support.

This beautiful post reaches deep into the inner selves of anyone who reads it carefully. Friendship, loyalty, trust and mentoring are all described, and honest conviction is expressed. The truth is given, and a free soul is clearly seen. Bravo!

Was deeply moved by this post. so full of truths, relative to prison and solitary confinement. I will re comment later when I have the time to finish my post

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