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Resisting Dehumanization Through First-Person Accounts of Solitary Confinement

by
Alexandra Fosbury

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the Honors Requirements for the Department of Philosophy
Dickinson College

Dr. Amy McKiernan, Supervisor
Dr. Jeffrey Engelhardt, Reader
Dr. Chauncey Maher, Reader
Dr. Crispin Sartwell, Reader

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Abstract

In this thesis I argue that solitary confinement should be abolished because it is a dehumanizing practice that harms the body physically and mentally. Unlike the assumption that solitary confinement is rehabilitative, this practice of punishment destroys one's sense of self. I begin this thesis by defining and differentiating terminology used in the discussion of prisons. Next, I identify and contest three common intuitions about solitary confinement: (1) solitary confinement is nonviolent, (2) solitary confinement is rehabilitative through solitude, and (3) solitary confinement is protective. Then, I provide an overview of the history of solitary confinement as a dehumanizing practice. I continue to argue in favor of the abolition of solitary confinement through the perspectives of three first-person narratives from formerly incarcerated individuals who collectively spent around half a century in solitary confinement. Lastly, I argue that the abolition of solitary confinement is important but insufficient for achieving justice. The abolition of solitary confinement is only one part of a larger prison abolition movement, which proposes investing money in programs such as education and healthcare in order to ultimately prevent the need for prisons as an overarching punishing and "protecting" body.

Table of Contents

Section I: Introduction.....	4
Section II: Definition of Key Terms.....	7
Section III: Three Common Intuitions about Solitary Confinement.....	12
Section IV: A Historical Overview of Solitary Confinement.....	20
Section V: First Person Accounts of Solitary Confinement.....	33
Section VI: Prison Abolition.....	45
Section VII: Conclusion.....	51
References.....	52

Section I: Introduction

Benjamin Rush, acclaimed psychiatrist, politician, and abolitionist, was a staunch advocate for the privatization of punishment, arguing that public punishment incited feelings of power and pride within a criminal (Guenther 2013, 5). Punishment that targeted the body and the mind, therefore, would be a stronger deterrent for criminals to commit further crimes.

Additionally, Rush claimed that criminality was a disease that could be cured through total sensory deprivation; thus, solitary confinement was born (Guenther 2013, 8). While solitary confinement included this removal of stimuli from the body and mind, it was also constructed to elicit a deep sense of shame in the individual because it “inflicted a psychic wound that was invisible yet visceral” (Guenther 2013, 5). This shame, in turn, aimed to produce what Rush called “republican machines,” or laborious citizens who abided by the government.

Rush first proposed solitary confinement as a method to remove the “genetic” criminality from a person by stripping away all other stimuli so the individual could reflect on their behavior (Guenther 2013, 7). From a religious or spiritual perspective, self-isolation and reflection may be beneficial to understanding oneself better. While Rush justified solitary confinement through this rehabilitative lens, he also advocated for underlying practices of humiliation, shame, and torture as components of this “rehabilitation” (Guenther 2013, 11). When prisoners are forced to take part in the “self-reflective” process of solitary confinement, it does not create a space for healing or processing, it instead breaks down the individual in harmful ways.

Contemporary philosopher Lisa Guenther challenges Rush’s views in *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives*, offering a phenomenological analysis of the experience of solitary confinement and arguing that solitary confinement is unethical as it

destroys the incarcerated individual's sense of self. Guenther describes this phenomenological deterioration in her introduction, writing, “Prisoners have become risks to be managed, resistances to be eliminated, and organisms to be fed, maintained, and even prevented from taking their own lives” (2013, xvi).

My thesis complements Guenther’s book, remaining consistent with the argument that solitary confinement is unethical because it destroys the sense of self of the incarcerated individual and therefore should be abolished. I utilize one of her primary first-person sources, Jack Henry Abbott, to share the unique experience of an individual who spent nearly his entire life under government control. Abbott’s time in solitary confinement resulted in severe mental and physical trauma, supporting Guenther’s argument that solitary confinement works to turn an individual on themselves and create self-inflicted damage (Guenther 2013, xii). Additionally, I analyze the first-person accounts of two formerly incarcerated individuals—Angela Davis and Albert Woodfox—to examine the experience of political prisoners in solitary confinement. Abbott, Davis, and Woodfox, despite their unique backgrounds and experiences in prison, came to the same conclusion that solitary confinement does not aim to rehabilitate individuals, but instead breaks them. Additionally, the inclusion of these voices is important because they are the voices of those who have been silenced and isolated in prison for many years. I diverge from Guenther by arguing that not only should solitary confinement be abolished, but the entire prison system should be abolished, instead prioritizing investing time and money into other institutions such as education and healthcare.

In my thesis, I argue that solitary confinement should be abolished on the grounds that (1) it does not have any rehabilitative or protective properties and (2) it actively employs harmful and dehumanizing practices. In order to best understand solitary confinement, I will begin by

defining and differentiating key terms used in the discussion of prison abolition at large. Next, I discuss three common intuitions about solitary confinement: (1) solitary confinement is nonviolent, (2) solitary confinement is rehabilitative through solitude, and (3) solitary confinement is protective. I continue with a history of the practice dating back to its inception, utilizing excerpts from Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* and Guenther's *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives* to contextualize the practice of solitary confinement. Next, I use a section from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* by Hannah Arendt to emphasize the dehumanizing practices solitary confinement employs as a means of total domination. Then, I transition into the 21st century, focusing on the function of solitary confinement in our prison system today through first-person accounts from formerly incarcerated individuals. I will take my proposal that solitary confinement is an unnecessary component of our prison system a step further by asserting that the abolition of solitary confinement should be a first step in the larger goal of prison abolition. The abolition of solitary confinement is necessary but insufficient. Based on my thesis, a space designated for the "worst of the worst" criminals to ensure they behave and deter them from committing further crimes produces nothing but emotionally, physically, and mentally scarred people. Understanding why the practice of solitary confinement is unethical is an important step in recognizing the flaws in our larger criminal justice system. Sustained change cannot be made without understanding that, as long as prisons exist as they do today, we may see solitary confinement disappear as a practice, but something similar and equally as damaging may reappear in its place¹.

¹ Michelle Alexander argues in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* that mass incarceration has evolved from the Jim Crow era which had previously evolved from the caste system both in chapter 1, "The Rebirth of Caste" and chapter 5 "The New Jim Crow".

On any given day, around 80,000 individuals are held in some form of isolation in the United States (Fenster 2020). Additionally, as of 2020, 2.2 million people were in the nation's prisons and jails (The Sentencing Project 2017). The United States has put too little faith in the value of education, healthcare and housing in favor of expanding the economic goldmine that is the prison industrial complex. According to the Prison Policy Initiative, individuals who are placed in solitary confinement multiple times throughout their time in prison are 24% more likely to experience an opioid overdose after release, 70% more likely to commit a homicide, and 129% more likely to commit suicide (Fenster 2020). Our criminal justice system now feeds off an increasing number of incarcerated individuals under the guise that it is reforming "criminals" and protecting "innocent" citizens. While I aim to leave behind a thesis on a topic that is often overlooked in larger discussions on the prison industrial complex, my work on prison abolition, and my life as an anti-"republican machine" has only just begun.

Section II: Definitions of Key Terms

In order to prevent confusion and offer clarity, I begin by defining the key terms I rely on to advance my argument that solitary confinement is an unethical practice and ought to be abolished. Consider the following definitions and distinctions:

a. Solitary Confinement and Solitude

It is important to note the difference between the terms "solitary confinement" and "solitude". Solitary confinement is defined as "the housing of an adult or juvenile with minimal to rare meaningful contact with other individuals" (Journal of Correctional Health Care 2016). In this thesis, I also make the distinction between solitary confinement and solitude. Solitude most frequently refers to a voluntary process of being alone, most often by choice. The significance of the latter half of this definition is that solitude, unlike solitary confinement, is a *voluntary*

process of being removed from the outside world most often to reflect on one's experiences, sometimes spiritually.

b. Mass Incarceration

I follow Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, who defined “mass incarceration” in an interview with PBS as:

...a massive system of racial and social control. It is the process by which people are swept into the criminal justice system, branded criminals and felons, locked up for longer periods of time than most other countries in the world who incarcerate people who have been convicted of crimes, and then released into a permanent second-class status in which they are stripped of basic civil and human rights, like the right to vote, the right to serve on juries, and the right to be free of legal discrimination in employment, housing, access to public benefits. (2014)

Unlike a narrower understanding of mass incarceration that merely considers the sheer numbers of those in prison, Alexander’s definition also takes into account the racial and social history of mass incarceration, including the dehumanizing and othering of those caught up in the “criminal justice” system. A component of what Alexander defines as mass incarceration includes the resulting civil death many incarcerated individuals experience during and after their time in prison. I define “civil death” in section e.

c. Prison Industrial Complex (PIC)

In relation to mass incarceration is the term Prison Industrial Complex (PIC), most notably used by formerly incarcerated activist, philosopher, and author Angela Davis. Davis describes the prison industrial complex in the following way:

The exploitation of prison labor by private corporations is one aspect among an array of

relationships linking corporations, government, correctional communities, and media...to contest prevailing beliefs that increased levels of crime were the root cause of mounting prison populations. Instead, they argued, prison construction and the attendant drive to fill these new structures with human bodies have been driven by ideologies of racism and the pursuit of profit. (Davis 2003, 84)

PIC refers to institutions including, but not limited to, jails and prisons. These institutions have emerged at the intersections between our nation's racist and capitalist foundations, resulting in an increase in the development of prisons and population density in prisons across the U.S.

d. Social Death

A common intuition about solitary confinement, which I address in the next section, is that the practice exists as a rehabilitative process for incarcerated individuals to reflect on their wrongdoings. Philosopher Lisa Guenther argues that solitary confinement has a result opposite from rehabilitation. Specifically, she draws on Orlando Patterson's notion of social death². According to Guenther, social death is the "effect of a social practice in which a person or group of people is excluded, dominated, or humiliated to the point of becoming dead to the rest of society" (2013, xx). Throughout my thesis, I build on Guenther's claim that solitary confinement results in social death and I reiterate the importance of social interaction and interpersonal connection for maintaining a sense of self. Guenther argues solitary confinement is itself a form of social death because it is the complete isolation of the individual from the outside world. Guenther writes, "...solitary confinement works by turning incarcerated individuals' constitutive

² In Orlando Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, he states that relationships with particular others are absolute, while relationships between a person and an object are not substantial. On page 20 Patterson writes: "Relations only exist between people...relations between persons with respect to some object are always relative never absolute." In solitary confinement, the goal is to remove an individual from the outside world, thus removing the opportunity to interact with other people and therefore sustain any relationships, interpersonal or internal.

relationality against themselves, turning their own capacities to feel, perceive, and relate to others in a meaningful world into instruments of their own undoing” (2013, xiii). Our sense of self is shaped through our relationship with others and removing access to meaningful relationships inhibits our ability to perceive ourselves *as* selves.

e. Civil Death

“Civil death” refers to the stripping of all political, civil, and legal rights of a “convicted felon” (Miller and Spillane 2012). While an individual may emerge from their time in prison physically alive, they may continue to experience instances of civil death where their legal rights are infringed upon, thus making them less than a fully legal, equal citizen. For example, incarcerated individuals may lose the right to vote--temporarily or permanently--when they are imprisoned. Prior to 2018, previously incarcerated individuals in Florida were prohibited from voting (Mower and Taylor 2020). While the law was recently overturned, thereby allowing formerly incarcerated individuals to vote, Georgetown University Law professor Neel Sukhatme found that only 43,500 previously incarcerated individuals had registered to vote out of a total of 850,000 (Mower and Taylor 2020). Despite the ability to register to vote, there is a lack of resources for freed individuals to register and the stigma surrounding formerly incarcerated individuals follows them once they are released from prison (Mower and Taylor 2020)³. Additionally, in states such as Rhode Island, some incarcerated people are ineligible to own property or annul a marriage (Mullins 2019).

f. Prison Reform

³ A Ban the Box campaign has prompted cities such as San Francisco, Seattle, New York, and Atlanta to remove the mandatory box to indicate if an individual has previously been arrested on a job application. This is an effort to remove the stigma surrounding previously incarcerated individuals and allow everyone equal opportunity to obtain employment. More information can be found on their website: <http://bantheboxcampaign.org/about/#.YFpMHi1h2yA>.

The term “prison reform” is often used today to call for improvements in the prison system at a legal level, from changing the requirements of strip searches to banning the death penalty. However, Angela Davis notes that the prison *itself* is a result of reformations to our methods of punishment (Davis 2003, 108). Additionally, prison reform only validates the existence of prisons in the first place and does not attempt to consider alternatives to the prison itself. Davis writes that the two words “prison” and “reform” side by side indicate a desire to “produce a better prison system,” (Davis 2003, 105). Davis notes that while reforms to the prison system in the short term are necessary, they are insufficient. She notes, for example, that addressing the sexual abuse in women’s prison is important for the immediate protection of women in prison; however, relying exclusively on reformations solidifies the idea that “nothing lies beyond the prison” (Davis 2003, 20).

g. Restorative Justice and Transformative Justice

The Centre for Justice & Reconciliation defines restorative justice as “a theory of justice that emphasizes repairing the harm caused by criminal behavior. It is best accomplished through cooperative processes that allow all willing stakeholders to meet, although other approaches are available when that is impossible. This can lead to transformation of people, relationships and communities” (Centre for Justice & Reconciliation 2021). Restorative justice focuses on repairing the harms caused by a crime through a collaborative process with the guilty party as well as those who were impacted. Similarly, transformative justice seeks to “make things right” without perpetuating more violence (Mingus 2018). Transformative justice was developed specifically to support marginalized groups that do not feel safe contacting authorities or counseling services, especially undocumented immigrants (Mingus 2018). According to

TransformHarm.org, transformative justice is based in an abolitionist framework with the goal of developing alternative institutions to prisons to make amends and support communities (2020).

h. Prison Abolition

Prison abolition, according to Davis, does not rely on one specific alternative to the prison nor does it advocate for the immediate removal of all prisons. Instead, a prison abolitionist seeks to “imagine a constellation of alternative strategies and institutions, with the ultimate aim of removing the prison from the social and ideological landscapes of our society” (Davis 2003, 107). Decarceration, Davis states, is the overarching goal of the prison abolition movement, which is propelled by a variety of alternatives to imprisonment. Some examples of these alternatives include “imprisonment-demilitarization of schools, revitalization of education at all levels, a health system that provides free physical and mental care to all, and a justice system based on reparation and reconciliation rather than retribution and vengeance” (Davis 2003, 107). In *Prison by Any Other Name: The Harmful Consequences of Popular Reforms* Maya Schenwar and Victoria Law build on Davis; they describe the pitfalls of prison reform, favoring the prison abolition approach. They argue that community-based policing programs are reactionary and deterrence-based approaches that do not address other institutions by which we could mitigate crime (Schenwar and Law 2020, 225). As Davis states, the goal with the prison abolition movement is to reimagine other institutions so that we may extract ourselves from the prison system and build up other programming such as education and healthcare to better support members of disproportionately imprisoned communities.

Now that I have defined important terms, I continue by identifying and challenging three common intuitions about solitary confinement.

Section III: Three Common Intuitions about Solitary Confinement

In this section I address three common intuitions about solitary confinement: (a) solitary confinement is nonviolent, (b) solitary confinement is rehabilitative through solitude, and (c) solitary confinement is protective. Victoria Law addresses the “persistent myths” that still exist around mass incarceration today despite the increased attention it has gained in her new novel *“Prisons Make Us Safer”*. Unlike other components of our criminal justice system such as the death penalty, public opinion on solitary confinement is sparse. Rather than discussing “myths” as Law does, I build on those myths to discuss three specific intuitions individuals may have about solitary confinement. The significance of addressing these intuitions is summed up in the introductory section of *“Prisons Make Us Safer”* when she states, “The persistence of this myth justifies the continuation of policies—and the introduction of new laws—that tear individuals from their homes, families, and communities, causing incalculable harm” (2021, 2). In order to best understand how we normalized the practice of solitary confinement and who it effects, we must first address these three common intuitions.

a. Solitary Confinement is nonviolent

Some may assume that solitary confinement is nonviolent due to the isolation of the person who is incarcerated. However, the practice of solitary confinement harms the physical and mental health of people who are incarcerated. One of the architects of solitary confinement, Benjamin Rush, intended to create a punishment system that elicited feelings of deep shame in order to prevent further crime (Foucault 1975, 11). Inducing severe emotions of shame and guilt was intended to make the individual in solitary confinement feel remorse; however, Rush went one step further by claiming that criminality was a disease of the mind that could be cured through total sensory deprivation and complete isolation in order to force the “criminal” into a period of reflection (Guenther 2013, 5). As Guenther argues, the phenomenological impact

individuals in solitary confinement experience includes violence not only to the body but also to the sense of self. While I will go into further detail on the deterioration of one's sense of self in solitary confinement as well as the physical violence experienced, at this point, it is important to note that violence covers not only physical violence but emotional and mental violence as well including forced isolation and sensory deprivation as a means of control and punishment.

One of the most disappointing facts noted in the ACLU's report, *Caged In: Solitary Confinement's Devastating Harm on Prisoners with Physical Disabilities*, is that disabled incarcerated individuals are often put into solitary confinement cells not because they have "misbehaved" but because there are not enough accessible cells throughout the rest of the prison (ACLU 2017). An example shared in this report tells the story of Richard Trevino who was wheelchair bound due to a spinal cord injury. Not only did the Woodbury County Jail not have any guardrails or apparatuses to assist Trevino in and out of his wheelchair, they also did not have any cells in the main prison that could fit a wheelchair, so he was placed in solitary confinement (ACLU 2017). While in solitary, Trevino was not provided any diapers (which he required in case he soiled himself in his chair), an emergency button, or access to any other accommodations necessary for Trevino's health and wellbeing. He was denied clean clothes and showers while in solitary and ended up continually soiling himself because he could not use the bathroom in his cell. Eventually, guards began ignoring Trevino and his requests entirely, which led him to begin self-harming as a result of his isolation and maltreatment (ACLU 2017).

Although just one example, Trevino's story directly opposes the claim that solitary confinement is a rehabilitative space because prisons do not even provide incarcerated individuals with basic necessities. Instead, they ignore the requests of incarcerated individuals and allow them to

deteriorate mentally and physically, even if they are only in solitary due to an inability to house them in any other part of the prison.

As a group that makes up 31% of individuals in prison, time in prison, particularly within solitary confinement, has severe physical impacts on disabled persons and their access to treatments and rehabilitation are halted while in prison (Zoukis 2017). Returning to the ACLU's report on the harms of solitary confinement for those with physical disabilities, disabled incarcerated individuals are much more likely to suffer decreasing health without access to professionals such as physiotherapists or even to check-ups including eye tests (ACLU 2017). Additionally, prisons are not built with accessibility or rehabilitation in mind; therefore, individuals in wheelchairs, for example, cannot access certain parts of the prison they are in and if they are able to fit into a cell or other enclosed space, they usually are unable to move around at all (ACLU 2017). Within solitary confinement, there is rarely ever time outside of one's cell, and if there is, incarcerated individuals must wear restraints and are often subjected to strip searches. Nearly 24 hours in a cell where one is completely immobile not only *impedes their mental rehabilitation and causes deterioration of mental health*, but it also prevents disabled incarcerated individuals from achieving physical rehabilitation as well. If prisons were meant to be a healing space, they would take into account accessibility for its disabled incarcerated individuals because it is necessary for both physical and mental rehabilitation.

This leads to the second misconception about solitary confinement: that it is a reflective or rehabilitative program within the prison.

b. Solitary Confinement as Rehabilitative Through Solitude

People may imagine solitary confinement as similar to a religious or spiritual retreat. Benjamin Rush based the model for solitary confinement on the principle of solitude as a means

for rehabilitation; however, forced isolation to elicit feelings of shame and guilt results in mental and physical consequences opposite of a spiritual retreat.

While “solitude” and “solitary confinement” are two different practices, solitary confinement is often viewed as a practice of solitude as punishment. “Solitude” suggests a space of sanctuary and calm, while solitary confinement is meant to evoke feelings of immense shame, guilt, and distress. As discussed in Section II, solitary confinement is an *involuntary* practice of punishment that is intended to harm an individual both mentally and physically while solitude is a *voluntary* practice often associated with spirituality and mindfulness. Although solitary confinement may have, at its inception, been considered an opportunity for “criminals” to reflect on their actions as one would in solitude, it is also used as a method of dehumanization and domination of incarcerated individuals.

While retreating to one’s cell for personal space and time to reflect may be a reasonable practice within a prison, that is a short-term voluntary decision made by the individual themselves. Solitary confinement, on the other hand, can be enforced by prison guards whenever they feel it is appropriate for any type of “offense” committed within prison. These supposed offenses that result in solitary confinement range from attacking a guard to looking at a guard for too long in the hallway. Albert Woodfox, civil rights activist and author, recalls his experiences in solitary confinement for over 40 years, noting that there never had to be a reason to receive time in solitary confinement, it was almost entirely at the discretion of prison staff (Woodfox 2017, 53). The arbitrariness of how incarcerated individuals can end up in solitary confinement shows how the practice is not meant to be rehabilitative.

c. Solitary Confinement is Protective

A common assumption about solitary confinement is that it is reserved for the most dangerous “criminals” within a prison. Therefore, when somebody is put in solitary confinement it is a necessary measure to protect other individuals in prison from that harmful person. On the other hand, solitary confinement has also been used as a protective space for vulnerable individuals within a prison, such as a child or LGBTQ+ individuals. In these cases, a person may be sent to solitary confinement with the intention of protecting them from other individuals in the prison.

The Netflix series *When They See Us*, based on the true story of the Exonerated Five, devotes an entire episode to Korey Wise, the child who spent the most time in prison and the only one to spend time in solitary confinement.⁴ Over his roughly three years in solitary, Wise experienced hallucinations and mental breaks; however, the reason he ended up in solitary confinement in the first place was because of advice from a prison guard (*When They See Us* 2019). After being severely beaten up by other inmates as just a young sixteen-year-old, Wise seeks protection from the other inmates by asking the female nurse for advice. When she refuses to help him and only insists that he begin to follow the rules and never disobey orders, a prison guard steps in and tells Wise to request time in solitary away from all other incarcerated individuals. Wise decides to request solitary confinement, assuming he will be able to relax without the fear of other incarcerated individuals attacking him. He quickly realizes, however, that while he is no longer exposed to the general prison population, Wise is now locked in a room with minimal light for all hours of the day unable to communicate with anyone besides the guard who drops off his meals. We see his deterioration throughout the second to last episode of the four-part series as he struggles through brutal summers with no air conditioning and

⁴ Korey Wise endorsed the depiction of himself in *When They See Us*, stating that actor Jharrel Jerome “He aced it” in a New York Times article in 2019. To see the endorsement from the Exonerated Five of all of the actors in the limited series, read the article by Aisha Harris here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/30/arts/television/when-they-see-us.html>.

hallucinations of his time before prison. While he initially felt that solitary confinement could protect him from the dangers of the larger prison population, he came to realize that learning to adapt and fight for yourself in the general prison population likely would have been safer than struggling alone in solitary confinement.

Wise's experience is not uncommon in prisons. A 2015 report by Black & Pink stated that prison staff sometimes defend solitary confinement solely as a protective measure (Lydon 2015, 35). While the Prison Rape Elimination Act states that isolation should only be used in extreme circumstances when there are no other options, Black & Pink notes that for incarcerated LGBTQ+ individuals, isolation is a routine practice (Lydon 2015, 35). Additionally, in 2014 *Roadmap for Change* reported excessive use of solitary confinement of LGBTQ+ individuals and individuals with AIDS, stating:

For many LGBT and gender non-conforming people, protective custody remains the default placement for periods of days, months, years, and in some cases, decades. In addition to the conditions themselves amounting to torture, solitary confinement usually restricts a person's access to education, work, and program opportunities. These opportunities are not only essential for maintaining a person's mental health, but are usually necessary for achieving good time credit and being paroled. This means that LGBT people, who are likely to serve much of their sentence in isolation, are also more likely to serve the maximum time (or longer) of non-life sentences. (Lydon 2015, 35)

Albert Woodfox, born to a poor mother in Louisiana in 1947, spent many years in prison for small misdemeanors before eventually receiving a life sentence for the suspected murder of a prison guard. Although he was innocent, Woodfox was portrayed as a vicious monster that

needed to be kept under strict monitoring. During his time in prison, Woodfox states that he was never violent towards another prison unless standing his own ground and protecting other inmates from rape and sexual assault (Woodfox 2020, 26). Woodfox emphasizes the only threat he posed to the prison was his education on philosophy and politics that he shared with fellow people at Angola prison. Despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that he was actually a uniting force within the prison community, guards kept him locked up in solitary confinement away from his fellow Angola Black Panther Party members to deter other incarcerated individuals from engaging in communist literature and political discussions. While the general public may assume that the “worst of the worst” within a prison population would be placed into solitary confinement for committing a heinous crime or posing a threat to other inmates, Woodfox’s experience as well as many others contest that claim and further emphasize that solitary confinement is not reserved for any particular inmate but instead used as a means of control and dehumanization of incarcerated individuals by prison staff. The argument that Woodfox was removed from the larger prison population to protect other incarcerated individuals from his violent tendencies is another component of this misconception that I believe has led to the normalization and support of solitary confinement.

Prison staff discriminate against individuals under the guise of protection—either of the individual or others within the prison. When looking from the outside in, many individuals may assume that selecting to be placed in solitary confinement for one’s own protection would allow for that rehabilitation Rush initially proposed; however, the isolation those individuals face from other human beings has a far greater impact on the mental health of the incarcerated individuals, whether it is a “voluntary” experience or not. Having identified three misconceptions, I now offer a brief overview of solitary confinement.

Section IV: A Historical Overview of Solitary Confinement

In this section I consider the origins of solitary confinement as designed by Benjamin Rush. Then I turn to Michel Foucault and Lisa Guenther's analysis of Rush in their own retelling of the history of punishment and solitary confinement respectively to further elaborate on the consequences of solitary confinement. This overview of solitary confinement in the United States is important for understanding the intention of a practice of punishment versus its impact on incarcerated individuals. While solitary confinement was not outwardly promoted as a method of torture for those in prison, the practice was built to destroy an individual both mentally and physically.

1. Benjamin Rush- The Birth of Solitary Confinement

Renowned physician, politician, and humanitarian Benjamin Rush advocated for punishment that targeted both the body and the mind. While the concept of solitary confinement was not created by Rush, he established strong arguments in favor of the practice. Before I delve into his contributions to the development of solitary confinement, I think it is important to note that despite his reputation as an abolitionist and human rights activist, Rush was far from supportive of Black people in the United States⁵. Rush believed that Black skin derived from leprosy and was therefore a curable disease (Guenther 2013, 7). Additionally, while Rush never openly stated Black people were inferior to white people, he argues that a poorer diet and "savage manners" are a few components that led to their darker skin tone, flatter noses, wider lips, and kinkier hair (Guenther 2013, 7-8). As a physician, he even went as far as to claim some white women had become Black after cohabitating with Black women which led him to become

⁵ AP News made the decision in 2020 to begin capitalizing the word Black but not white in the context of race and culture. In this thesis I adhere to this new protocol. More information can be found on the AP News website: <https://apnews.com/article/7e36c00c5af0436abc09e051261fff1f>.

a committed segregationist, arguing for Blacks-only farming colonies in Pennsylvania. While we may portray him as a heroic signer of the Declaration of Independence and a founder of Dickinson College, it is important to recognize and take responsibility for his racism.

According to Rush, public punishment gave criminals the attention they desired with public witnesses and did not deter them from committing more crimes (Guenther 2013, 5). While Rush's intention may have been to reform the soul, suffering and shame were necessary components to this process. In his "Enquiry into the Effects of Public Punishment," Rush argues that "like a doctor who becomes desensitized to the pain of his patients after witnessing it so many times, criminals and citizens alike would no longer be deterred from committing a crime if they watch such public spectacles of punishment too often" (Guenther 2013, 6). As the United States transitioned into a new American republic, Rush claimed that "[s]ympathy and sensibility" would be driving factors in forming, as Rush describes them, "republican machines" (Guenther 2013, 6). These "republican machines" were hard-working American citizens whose actions benefited the government overall. A criminal was, therefore, a citizen who was actively opposing Rush's model and was therefore a threat to the new republic. In order to ensure the new form of punishment in the United States was effective, Rush insisted that punishment must include intense shaming in order to ensure a criminal would feel guilty and willing to repent for their mistakes. During the 1800s, Rush's proposal to transform punishment to include both the body and the mind was considered a reformation of the previous system, gaining intense support from citizens, especially religious ones who felt that isolation would create a space for criminals to reflect and repent. Criminality itself, Rush also claims, was a disease, rooted in defects of the "moral faculties of the mind" that could be cured in a space with no agitators (Guenther 2013, 8).

In the “Lectures on Animal Life” from 1799, Rush argues that stimuli create an outpouring of passions and emotions that can lead to people overlooking their sensibility and acting unreasonably (Guenther 2013, 7). Negative emotions such as anger and frustration can be experienced by some individuals in excess, Rush argues, and that is where the healing powers of solitary confinement become the most viable option to curing one’s criminality. As a physician, Rush states that a space void of all stimuli will allow an individual experiencing an uneven balance of negative emotions to heal because there is no overstimulation occurring. Rush even put his own son in solitary confinement for 27 years because he experienced signs of depression and had murdered another man (Guenther 2013, 9). After those 27 years John, Rush’s son, died, never having another opportunity to integrate into society or experience a space with stimuli and never reemerging “free of criminality”.

Tension eventually began to arise between advocates of solitary confinement. Enoch Edwards, a fellow physician and good friend of Rush, for example, favored solitary confinement as a replacement for capital punishment. Edwards approved of solitary confinement not because it was a more humane approach to punishment but because it caused prolonged suffering and extensive isolation that, according to him, was “a greater evil than certain death” (Guenther 2013, 11). Another advocate, Francis Calley Gray, agreed that solitary confinement would have a deeper imprint on incarcerated individuals, which he described as a “deeper remembrance of horror” (Guenther 2013, 11). Rush held a hypocritical stance on solitary confinement, stating that solitary confinement had the benefit of creating increased suffering for criminals but could also be employed to heal his psychiatric patients of their suffering (Guenther 2013, 10). In short, solitude experienced by criminals would be an involuntary process where, as Rush stated, “Every thought should recoil wholly upon himself” (Guenther 2013, 11). Solitude within the prison was

intended to inflict shame upon the incarcerated individuals and force them to feel completely out of control of their situation, leading to prolonged and intensified feelings of anxiety and stress. Rush's goals for privatized punishment seeped outside of the development of solitary confinement and into the creation of the penitentiary, the model of our current prisons.

2. Michel Foucault- Discipline and Punish

In *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault follows the transformation of punishment from a public spectacle to our modern practices of punishment. In the 1700s, there was a movement to get rid of the spectacle of public punishment because there were open displays of barbarity such as whipping, quartering, and flogging. Unsurprisingly, Foucault quotes Benjamin Rush hoping that those gruesome acts of savagery would one day be the past of punishment, instead utilizing the "feeble influence of reason and religion over the human mind" (Foucault 1975, 10). Rush uses this platform to propose solitary confinement as a rehabilitative and transformative space where individuals will be cured of their criminality without the encouragement from spectators.

Another large push for the transition away from public spectacles as punishment, Foucault argues, was based on the desire to inflict both physical and mental suffering upon the criminal (Foucault 1975, 11). Unlike previous public displays of beheading and stoning, this new form of punishment now included both corporeal and mental harm, but the body was no longer the primary target of the penal system (Foucault 1975, 11). As Guenther explains, Rush stated that the excessive amount of shame and guilt that can be inflicted upon incarcerated individuals in solitary confinement was an added benefit compared to previous forms of punishment. There could now be a prolonged sense of mental anguish alongside physical distress that is meant to dissuade the criminal from wanting to commit a crime again. At its core, Foucault describes

punishment as a tool designed to be used “exactly enough to prevent repetition” (Foucault 1975, 14).

Punishment itself is not meant to be doled out excessively, only to match the significance of the crime committed. For example, a murderer should receive longer and more forceful punishment than a child who stole a piece of gum from the store. The response should be proportional. In theory, this practice could be considered the most humane use of punishment out there, assuming we wanted to continue using prisons as institutions. However, Foucault states that the public executions created an expectation of severe, gruesome punishments that would not prevent the criminal from committing another crime nor dissuade the general public from committing crimes themselves (Foucault 1975, 7). Torture does not right any wrongs committed by a criminal or teach them a lesson, but prolonged punishment would allow for the rehabilitation of criminals. In order for this process to function, however, a clear code needed to be defined that would create a hierarchy of crimes through which prisons could follow when selecting how long and how severe a punishment should be for an individual. Under this model, solitary confinement could be a justified tool for punishment for extreme criminals such as murderers or rapists.

Not only was punishment reformed in order to become more effective in deterring future crimes, but it also served as a retribution on behalf of the criminal to their fellow citizens (Foucault 1975, 109). Based on the crime, a criminal would serve time and receive punishment that would reestablish balance between the individual and the community that was impacted by their actions. While in prison, penalties could also be given to those who misbehaved further but rather than establish a code for penalties, prison administration were often given the responsibility of choosing these punishments.

Due to the lack of clarity as to what deserves a penalty and what type of penalty should be afforded an individual, incarcerated individuals often do not know if how they are behaving will benefit them or land them time in solitary confinement. Foucault writes that even “in 1597 a incarcerated individual was condemned to twelve years’ imprisonment, which could be reduced to eight, if his behaviour proved satisfactory” (Foucault 1975, 121). “Satisfactory behaviour” does not include any specifications; therefore, incarcerated individuals are attempting to appear better behaved for the sake of a reduced sentence without knowing whether their actions are actually considered sufficient or not and the sufficiency is determined by prison staff. In order to maintain control over the incarcerated individuals, they are often treated like young men in the military following strict regimented schedules with constant work. Throughout history, prison labor has been abused to create material goods we use throughout our world with little to no pay for the labor itself. Instead, this labor is considered a penalty for criminals' poor behavior and counts towards their repentance to society.

Through the control of activity, as Foucault describes it, guards are more capable of controlling their incarcerated individuals and, like soldiers, they are often pushed to their limits in order to achieve the most malleable and easily controlled mental and physical states. This exhaustive labor is not the only physical component of the prison, however, as Foucault notes that forced labor or imprisonment has never functioned without an additional source of stress or harm on the body. Positing this, Foucault argues that punishment on the body itself such as the rationing of food, sexual deprivation, corporal punishment, and solitary confinement may be an “unintentional, but inevitable, consequence of imprisonment” (Foucault 1977, 16). Assuming this, we now understand prisons as inherently violent against the body, whether intentionally facilitated or not, which can lead to degradation of one’s sense of self both physically and

mentally. Lisa Guenther approaches solitary confinement through a phenomenological lens, arguing that this practice leads to both civil and social death.

3. Lisa Guenther- Phenomenology and Social Death

In *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives*, Guenther posits that solitary confinement, “works by turning incarcerated individuals’ constitutive relationality against themselves, turning their own capacities to feel, perceive, and relate to others in a meaningful world into instruments of their own undoing” (Guenther 2013, xii). Not only are incarcerated individuals initially removed from society when they are first sent to prison, they are then further removed from their internal community of fellow incarcerated individuals when they are placed in solitary confinement. As described by Foucault, public punishment was not viewed as redemptive enough, so reformers pushed for a new form of punishment that would allow for introspective spaces and rehabilitation. By placing the emphasis less on immediate physical harm and more on prolonged anxiety and suffering surrounding an unknown quantity and time of punishment, criminals were assumed to be privier to giving in and conforming to societal norms (Guenther 2013, 6-7). The origins of solitary confinement were never positive nor effective, beginning with John Rush’s death in solitary confinement after 27 years. Continuing its horrific legacy, prisons such as Auburn had to greatly adjust their solitary confinement policies in 1819 after five incarcerated individuals died and at least half of all solitary confinement inmates suffered long term physical and emotional trauma following their time in solitary (Guenther 2013, 14-15).

Additionally, Rush had created solitary confinement with the intention of destroying *part* of the person--that part of the mind where one's criminality existed--however when one is completely removed from human interaction, there are long term psychological effects that

damage a human's ability to perceive themselves as a self (Guenther 2013, xi). Everything from the architecture of the prison to the guards who patrol the halls is designed to impose the most isolating and dehumanizing experience possible so that incarcerated individuals can become easily controlled and eventually begin to behave like a "good Samaritan", as Rush states (Guenther 2013, 222). A "good Samaritan" is comparable to a "republican machine". In order to satisfy Rush's understanding of a republican machine, one must be a member of society that abides by the government and contributes their work to the betterment of society (Guenther 2013, 7). However, those that were targeted for punishment were not initially slaves or other marginalized groups that had not experienced freedom within society at large. Interestingly, for white Christians, Guenther writes, it was "someone who was free enough to experience the deprivation of freedoms as a meaningful punishment--namely, a white man with a redeemable Christian soul" (Guenther 2013, 42). Guenther argues, while the goal of an enclosed, isolated space like solitary confinement may attempt to reform the individual by teaching them to adapt to their environment and manage their emotions, the consequence is it prevents a person from having any other human contact and removes their ability to understand themselves physically and conceptually.

Guenther turns to author and formerly incarcerated individual Jack Henry Abbott who describes his own deterioration in solitary confinement through a moment where he was running back and forth within his cell moaning and screaming. He did not initially realize he was the one screaming, however, mistaking it for another individual somewhere within his cell walls. After so many years in solitary confinement with absolutely no human interaction or even light to perceive the space Abbott began slamming his fist into the walls to regain a sense of feeling and could not distinguish his own screams from those of another ambient being in his space (Abbott

1981, 27). Guenther also states that common symptoms of solitary confinement include “anxiety, fatigue, confusion, paranoia, depressions, hallucinations, headaches and uncontrollable trembling” (2013, xi). When Abbott first emerged from many years in solitary confinement, for example, he noted how, while in solitary, “you are living a demonstration of the theory of the infinite within the finite; the dream within the reality” (1981, 49). Within his cell Abbott relied so heavily on his own emotions and sensations that everything began to feel like a mirage, even when it was real. While Abbott’s example may sound extreme, it is not uncommon for incarcerated individuals in solitary confinement to experience such intense episodes of self-harm or hallucinations. However, Abbott argues that these are attempts to reconnect or re-establish oneself within their space rather than potential episodes of psychosis (Abbott 1981, 28).

While some may argue that these are rarities within the practice of solitary confinement or even that severe trauma may be deserved in some instances, I argue that because of the harmful impact solitary confinement has on incarcerated individuals, it is an unethical practice. Assuming that Rush’s intention was to create solitary confinement for rehabilitation through reflection and shame, Guenther proves that there is no reformation possible when an individual is removed from society entirely and thus loses the ability to connect with other humans and themselves. As one’s time in solitary confinement is extended, they lose their sense of self and become dead to the outside world and unrecognizable within themselves. This loss of their sense of self is furthered through an initial loss of uniqueness that incarcerated individuals experience first entering prison. Whether it is being called by a last name or number, not being addressed at all, or not having access to any clothing, mirrors, or hygiene products, the individual is eventually broken down both emotionally and physically (Guenther 2013, 14). Once this individual becomes socially dead--a ghost within the larger community and within themselves--

they are more easily controlled and manipulated, a necessary component of domination that Hannah Arendt discusses in the “Total Domination” chapter of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

4. Hannah Arendt- Practices of Total Domination

In this section, I explore how dehumanization operates in the context of mass incarceration. While I am careful not to directly compare the dehumanization in concentration camps to solitary confinement in the United States, I find Arendt's analysis instructive for thinking about how dehumanization operates⁶.

Arendt defines total domination as a practice that “...strives to organize the infinite plurality and differentiation of human beings as if all of humanity were just one individual” (Arendt 1966, 438). This process of dehumanization and total control can only be accomplished, Arendt argues, by reducing every person to a predictable series of reactions. Arendt describes three steps to total domination: 1) “kill the juridical person in man”, 2) “murder of the moral person in man”, and 3) death of “the individual, his unique identity” (Arendt 1966, 447-457).

Arendt notes that concentration camps began as a space for criminals. This created a foundation for the permissibility of concentration camps because it was a space where convicted criminals were stripped of their rights as punishment for the wrongs they committed (Arendt 1966, 449). Eventually, the introduction of groups such as Jews were validated under the premise that their existence was criminal enough, but the practices from concentration camps had already existed before the Holocaust began. Arendt describes the death of the juridical person as a “prerequisite” of total domination, suggesting that the foundational component of dehumanization is stripping him of his rights as a citizen (Arendt 1966, 451). In order to reach

⁶ In *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt specifies that nothing can be compared to life in concentration camps, nor should it be, as that creates confusion and draw attention from what she states is most important: “Forced labor in prisons and penal colonies, banishment, slavery, all seem for a moment to offer helpful comparisons, but on closer examination lead nowhere” (125).

civil death, one must feel removed from society. This would begin by receiving fewer or no rights in comparison to fellow citizens, thereby severing ties of citizenship to the outside world before ending human contact entirely. The complete isolation from society is developed in the second step that Arendt discusses.

The second step is characterized by the death of the moral person, suggesting that right and wrong can no longer be differentiated. Arendt states that, through terror and militant control, one's moral compass may deteriorate "making the decisions of conscience absolutely questionable and equivocal" (Arendt 1966, 452). Without a clear understanding of what is acceptable and what is not, individuals may feel as though there is no longer an ability to "do good" within the camps (Arendt 1966, 452). If one can be beaten or penalized for walking too slowly, someone begins to live their whole life in a constant state of fear and terror, which makes one easily susceptible to influence from people with power. Not only is there a loss of the moral person, but there is also the removal of individuals from society entirely, which Arendt calls "anonymous death" of the individual.

Arendt describes anonymous death as a process that effectively makes it impossible for anyone to know whether another individual is dead or alive (Arendt 1966, 452). In the concentration camps, individuals were immediately separated from their families and sorted into groups based on age, gender, skill, ability, etc. Maintaining complete isolation from others in the camp was essential in total domination because it cut off contact between individuals with a previous relationship. Without constant contact or any access to one another, individuals in the camps could never be sure if their loved ones or acquaintances were dead or alive, thus leaving everyone in a limbo of semi-existing. We witness a similar process of anonymous death within prisons today.

Solitary confinement, in particular, is a practice that not only cuts off an individual from the outside world, but also disconnects them from the community within the prison. As Guenther describes, this has a severe physical and mental impact on the individual, but it also impacts the rest of the prison community who are unaware whether someone is dead, alive, or has even transferred to another cell or prison. Despite forming groups and small communities within concentration camps and prisons, guards still have the power to further isolate individuals. Whether or not someone survives time in a concentration camp, they have lived an existence with so much terror that they themselves feel completely removed from the outside world. The social death experienced in the concentration camps would more effectively sever them from the outside world than real death, as they have existed in utter oblivion for so long that their new reality is one of complete isolation (Arendt 1966, 443). Once individuals have been isolated from society entirely, guards may more easily complete the third, final, and most difficult step of total domination: the death of one's unique identity.

During the Holocaust, individuals often had their heads shaved and were forced to wear ill-fitting clothes that matched one another and wore a symbol to indicate which "group" they belonged to⁷. In addition, they were packed into carts like animals for slaughter and driven for days with no food, water, or proper ventilation before arriving at their camp to be sorted into groups and branded with a tattoo that would permanently signify their identity (Arendt 1966, 454-5). Without names or any specific characteristics that could indicate one individual from another, the process of destroying one's uniqueness was put into practice. Although Arendt describes this process as the most difficult in the practice of total domination, it is also necessary

⁷ Individuals in concentration camps were required to wear a symbol to recognize which "group" they belonged to, further distancing them from their unique identity. Read more about it here: <http://auschwitz.org/en/history/prisoner-classification/system-of-triangles>

in order for a group to maintain complete control and power over another (Arendt 1966, 457). By first establishing civil death of individuals, followed by a loss of meaningful relationships with others, total domination can be reached and sustained through a loss of conception of the self. These dehumanizing practices serve as the foundation to assert and maintain control over others with the intent to create a group of conditioned citizens that will obey a totalitarian regime. Arendt states that each person is unique and in order to obtain total control over an individual, one must strip them of their uniqueness.

Solitary confinement, as Foucault and Guenther describe, poses a threat to one's uniqueness. We also learn, however, that part of what preserves one's sense of self is understanding that self as relational, which is what Margo Perkins argues Angela Davis and Assata Shakur do in their autobiographies (Perkins 2000, 7). I include accounts from Jack Henry Abbott, Angela Davis, and Albert Woodfox in my thesis because they are a handful of voices that represent thousands of citizen's real experiences in solitary confinement. Additionally, Davis and Woodfox write "political autobiographies"⁸ which, according to Perkins include the following educational components:

(1) that the autobiographer will emphasize the story of the struggle over her own personal ordeals; (2) that she will use her own story both to document a history of the struggle and to further its political agenda; (3) that she will provide a voice for the voiceless; (4) that she will honor strategic silences in order to protect the integrity of the struggle as well as the welfare of other activists; (5) that she will expose the oppressive conditions and the repressive tactics of that state; and (6) that she will use the autobiography as a form of political intervention, to educate as broad an audience as

⁸ Angel Davis coined this term when writing her own autobiography in 1974 (Perkins 2000, 7).

possible to the situation and issues at stake. (Perkins 2000, 7)

Both Davis and Woodfox's autobiographies serve not only to share their own experiences in solitary confinement, but also to educate on the parallels between their time in prison with the "historical experience of slavery" in order to investigate how conditions for Black Americans have, in many ways, remained the same. (Perkins 2000, 40)

Section V: First Person Accounts of Solitary Confinement

In this section I draw on the experiences of three formerly incarcerated individuals to further argue that solitary confinement is a dehumanizing practice, and therefore unethical⁹. While these three first-person accounts may seem like a small portion of a much larger community of individuals in solitary confinement, Jack Henry Abbott, Angela Davis, and Albert Woodfox represent a variety of ages, races, backgrounds, and experiences in solitary confinement. Even though all three individuals were able to resist the dehumanizing practices in solitary, they all experienced a variety of inhumane punishments that were intended to destroy their sense of self. Abbott, Davis, or Woodfox represent individuals who survived their time in solitary confinement and attest to my argument that the practice is not rehabilitative, nonviolent, or protective.

1. Jack Henry Abbott

Jack Henry Abbott spent almost his entire life in prison, a direct product of the prison system, entering a juvenile detention center first at age nine (Abbott 1981, 6). While in prison, Abbott began writing letters to Norman Mailer, documenting his experiences while incarcerated.

⁹ While I do not analyze Assata Shakur's autobiography in my thesis, it has been instructive in how I think about prison abolition. I chose to read *Assata: An Autobiography* by Shakur outside of my thesis research. Her story is one that is informative on police brutality and corruption as well as how threatened the United States government was by two of the leading civil rights movements: The Black Liberation Army and The Black Panther Party, which both Angela Davis and Albert Woodfox were members of.

This communication assisted in the development of Abbott's book *In the Belly of the Beast*. During his time in prison, Abbott spent years in and out of solitary confinement, which was previously named "The Hole". Abbott primarily notes the architecture of a solitary confinement cell, whose ten foot by ten-foot space was suffocating and could not be considered movement, no matter how many often he paced back and forth (Abbott 1981, 43). Abbott writes, "Let us say a kind of movement that is not really movement exists there. To illustrate: to walk ten miles in an enclosed space of ten feet is not really movement" (Abbott 1981, 43). Void of any light or amenities besides a space to use the restroom and a bed, Abbott notes that there are both severe physical and psychological impacts on an individual when they are isolated from the outside world. First, he states that memory and imagination morph into one in the cell, nobody can distinguish what actually occurred in the past and what they have made up in their minds (Abbott 1981, 46). Without access to any human contact, an individual must rely solely on themselves to maintain memories and keep the mind active, even if that includes creating stories in their head that slowly transition into reality. We see this same deterioration with Korey Wise in *When They See Us* as he replays his final night of freedom over and over again in his head, changing what he says and does ever so slightly until the entire story has transformed (*When They See Us* 2019). Abbott describes this psychological deterioration in solitary confinement, writing:

In the hole after a while the painful elements begin to throw out shoots and spout like brittle weeds in the garden of memory--until finally, after so long, they choke to death everything else in the garden. You are left with a wild wasteland of scrubby weeds and flinty stone and dusty soil. They call it *psyche-pain*. (Abbott 1981, 47)

This "psyche-pain" Abbott describes is also accompanied by physical destruction that, in solitary confinement, is completely self-inflicted. Rush's initial concept of creating immense

feelings of guilt expands beyond the recognition of one's wrongdoing, according to Abbott, as the complete isolation leaves the incarcerated person to blame for any harms they face while in solitary. Everything turns onto the self during this time in solitary confinement, Abbott shares, as the individual is first isolated from the outside world before being further isolated from other incarcerated individuals. Abbott indirectly describes Guenther's concept of social death through his own experiences writing, "So when a man is being taken farther and farther away from experience, he is being taken to his death" (Abbott 1981, 53). According to Abbott, removing an individual from shared experiences with others, whether in the outside world or in prison, is eventually leading to his metaphorical death from society. Abbott delves further in the psychological turmoil he faced while in solitary confinement, beginning with his time in a blackout cell where the only noises he heard outside from those in his head and his low mutterings, "was the bang of the keys and the creaking of the apparatus once a day" (Abbott 1981, 26). Unlike other fist-hand accounts I explore in the thesis, Abbott's experience is unique as he was kept in complete isolation without access to light or any human interaction whatsoever. In one haunting paragraph, Abbott describes a time he could hear the loud wails of another incarcerated individual while in solitary confinement, writing, "I heard someone screaming far away and it was me. I fell against the wall, and as if it were a catapult, was hurled across the cell from the opposite wall. Back and forth I reeled, from the door to the walls screaming. Insane" (Abbott 1981, 27).

Over time, Abbott became "unhinged" from himself, unable to differentiate between his own actions and those of others¹⁰. Abbott was not only subject to months of time in pitch

¹⁰ On page 172, Guenther includes the term "unhinged" to describe the disassociation from one's sense of self that individuals in prison experienced during solitary confinement. In sharing Abbott's experience, the term "unhinged" seemed fitting for the mental and physical trauma he too suffered while in solitary confinement.

blackness in solitary confinement, but he was also punished through the starvation diet--a practice that prevented incarcerated individuals from obtaining any food or water for days until they had proven they were capable of “behaving” (Abbott 1981, 29). While this practice was eventually prohibited in prisons, Abbott had spent over a year on the starvation diet. Abbott notes the irony of calling this practice the “starvation diet” as there was no similarity between *forced* starvation and a fast or diet, which Abbott claims to be *voluntary* actions (Abbott 1981, 31). Like solitary confinement, the starvation diet was not a voluntary practice for incarcerated individuals and therefore did not have the same results as a weekend in silence at a monastery or a week-long juice cleanse as these names suggest. Like the starvation diet versus a cleanse, solitary confinement differs greatly from solitude because solitary confinement is not a voluntary practice but rather a method of punishment.

Introduced to the prison system at only nine years old, Abbott fell prey to the first two of the three components of total domination Arendt set out, starting with the death of the juridical man. As Abbott describes, he was not aware of what life was like outside of a government institution, as he started out as an orphan bouncing around to different centers before experiencing time in a juvenile detention center. Without any understanding of his own rights as a citizen, imprisoned or not, Abbott was only familiar with the limited opportunities incarcerated individuals had, alongside the dehumanization practiced in prison. Abbott also highlights the imminent death of the moral man as he was exposed to excessive violence early and often as a means of establishing dominance and surviving in prison. Abbott states that because of this treatment in prison, there did not exist a clear line between good and bad, because a guard would punish someone for absolutely anything. He clarifies this further when he writes, “Any sane man may wonder: What grievous crime would a man have to commit to be thus treated? The answer:

In prison, anything at all...*An eye for an eye*" (Abbott 1981, 29). The "moral man", as Arendt describes it, does not exist for Abbott in prison because the line between good and bad does not exist, individuals are punished for just existing in prison.

Abbott was also a victim of drug therapy, where he was fed a cocktail of various drugs meant to subdue him (Abbott 1981, 35). Despite not showing any evidence of mental illness, prison guards and psychiatrists alike consistently forced inmates to take a variety of tranquilizers. Abbott asks, "We are not crazy, so why do they do it?" when reflecting on the excessive drugs administered to incarcerated individuals. "Because they fear us; we are dangerous. We fear nothing they can do to us, not even the drugs, the crucifixion" (Abbott 1981, 36). The drugs were not meant to assist in their rehabilitation, they were a form of control over people who were incarcerated by the guards. Eventually, Abbott had a mental file of the impacts each drug had on him. Abbott considered drugging a form of experimentation, where he could test his limits and abilities physically. In response to this forced medication, Abbott was able to maintain his sense of self because he made a project out of monitoring how his body and mind were reacting to the drugs. While the prison successfully achieved Arendt's first two steps of total domination, Abbott was able to maintain his sense of self and individuality through this drug experimentation and his practice of writing to Normal Mailer. Therefore, Abbott's acts of rebellion sustained him throughout his many years in prison and solitary confinement and prevented total domination from occurring. If the initial goal of solitary confinement, however, was to achieve reformation for damaged individuals, Abbott's experience is evidence of the opposite.

In order to become reformed, Rush argued, one must take responsibility for his wrongdoings and follow the rules laid out in prison, thus establishing they were now worthy of reentering society as "republican machine[s]". Abbott states the reason he remained in prison as

long as he did was because he actively defied the guilt and shame forced on incarcerated individuals. Abbott's fear, he writes, was that, by adjusting to prison, "I could by that alone never adjust to society" (Abbott 1981, 14). In prison, the behaviors of "good" incarcerated individuals is not reflective of a strong integration back into the outside world. Instead, these behaviors are meant to assist the state and guards in practices of total domination and control of those in prison (Arendt 1966, 451). However, Abbott recognized that being an "upstanding" member of prison society did not translate to a seamless transition back into the outside world with a low chance of returning to prison. This, Abbott argues, is because incarcerated individuals are not treated with respect or taught forgiveness in prison, so their actions do not reflect an idealized concept of rehabilitation from prison. Abbott writes, "The model we emulate is a fantastically defiant and alienated individual who cannot imagine what forgiveness is, or mercy or tolerance, because he has no *experience* of such values" (Abbott 1981, 13).

In 1981, Abbott was released with the support of Norman Mailer and went to a halfway house in New York (Worth 2002). Just six weeks after he was released for parole, Abbott stabbed a man to death outside of a small cafe but managed to evade consequences until 1982 where he was once again sentenced to prison, this time for 15 years to life. In 2002 Abbott passed away in an apparent suicide at the Wende Correctional Facility, still serving his time for the murder of Richard Adan (Worth 2002). While Abbott defines himself as a product of the state, Angela Davis was an activist defying the state through her involvement in the Communist Party and the Black Panther Party.

2. Angela Davis

In 1971, Angela Davis was arrested after her legally obtained guns were used in a courtroom takeover. Despite not being directly involved in this incident, Davis' political activism

as a vocal member of the Communist Party and an advocate for civil rights landed her in prison for over a year before she was acquitted in 1972 (Stern 1971). When Davis first entered the Women's Detention Center, she viewed her time in prison as an opportunity to educate others she met and unite people who were wrongfully convicted. However, as soon as Davis arrived, she was placed in solitary confinement as a "protective measure", being told that the other incarcerated individuals in the center hated her and could be a threat to her safety. Eventually, Davis and her legal team had her removed from solitary confinement, only for her to be placed in "4b," a section of the prison designated for women that were "psychologically unsound" (Davis 1974, 32). During her time in 4b, Davis became aware of the controlling practices guards were using to subdue incarcerated individuals. Davis first notes that the women received pills with each meal, writing, "...these women received Thorazine with their meals each day and, even if they were completely sane, the tranquilizers would always make them uncommunicative and detached from their surroundings" (Davis 1974, 31-2).

Like Abbott who received a variety of drugs to tranquilize and immobilize him, the incarcerated individuals Davis lived with did not necessarily require the Thorazine for their own mental health. However, it was a practice normalized within prison as "protective" and "beneficial" rather than a large-scale method of control. Davis notes that this practice of drugging incarcerated women was not meant to assist in their rehabilitation but instead to stunt it. She writes, "Regardless of why the women in 4b had been placed there, they were all being horribly damaged. Whatever problems they had had initially were not solved, but rather systematically aggravated" (Davis 1974, 34). Based on the experience of both Abbott and Davis, the practice of drugging incarcerated individuals was not intended to assist in the betterment of those in prison.

Davis' main legal and personal support during her time in prison was Margaret Burnham, her childhood friend¹¹. Davis writes that "Margaret was my only link to my comrades, my friends, and she kept me from being totally swallowed up by the madness of that dungeon" (Davis 1974, 37). Davis had a support network and access to visitors who aided her in legal battles and also kept her in touch with the outside. Additionally, a "Free Angela and All Political Prisoner's" movement began following Davis' arrest, and she was able to occasionally see and hear protesters supporting her release. The movement gained traction across the United States and created economic and legal support for Davis' ultimate release. For Davis, this connection to the outside world played the primary role in maintaining her sanity while in prison, alongside the desire to fight back against the guards and the larger prison industrial complex. Arendt emphasizes the death of the individual and their unique identity as the final and most important component of total domination, as well as the most difficult to achieve. For Davis, the constant communication and close relationships to others allowed her to maintain a strong sense of self as well as a purpose for surviving her time in solitary confinement.

Already educated and politically active, Davis was well aware of her Constitutional rights as a citizen and did not allow the belittling and attempted isolation from prison guards prevent her from maintaining constant contact with other individuals. From the perspective of a student of philosophy versed in Communist literature and heavily involved in civil rights movements, Davis posed an intellectual rather than physical threat to the guards in prison; however, their response to her was the same as to the other incarcerated individuals-- isolate her from the outside world as well as the community inside of the prison. Although Davis spent significantly

¹¹ During her time in prison, Davis kept in constant contact with George Jackson via mail as he served time for armed robbery. The relationship they kindled through these letters was an additional way in which Davis was able to maintain a sense of self and the power to continue rebelling.

less time in solitary than Abbott and Albert Woodfox, her conclusions about prisons and solitary confinement were the same:

Jails and prisons are designed to break human beings, to convert the population into specimens in a zoo--obedient to our keepers, but dangerous to each other...All its elements are based on an assumption that the prison system will continue to survive.

Precisely for this reason, the system does not move to crush it. (Davis 1974, 52-3)

Rush claims that the prison, specifically solitary confinement, exists to rehabilitate individuals and cure them of their criminality. Davis argues, however, that the prison industrial complex relies on the prison system surviving, but if the goal of prisons was rehabilitation, would we not expect the aim to be no longer needing prisons? As a political prisoner, the intention behind Davis' arrest and imprisonment was to isolate her from the outside world and prevent her from educating other incarcerated individuals and uniting others in a fight to abolish prisons. Albert Woodfox did not enter Angola as a political prisoner, but his four decades in solitary confinement was another attempt to isolate a radical inmate from others in order to prevent the mass-education of incarcerated individuals.

3. Albert Woodfox

Albert Woodfox did not enter prison as a high-security individual, but as a young, relatively uneducated man from Louisiana who was arrested for a handful of petty crimes. Growing up poor with a single mother and a handful of siblings led Woodfox to pass time committing crimes, which he described as "outsmarting the world" (Woodfox 2017, 14). While in prison, Woodfox and three other men were accused of murdering a guard. Despite lack of evidence, three of the four men, including Woodfox, were held in prison for four decades following this murder as the only suspects in the case. During this time, Woodfox was kept in

solitary confinement because he was considered a threat to others as a convicted murderer. In reality, Woodfox had been introduced to the literature of Marx, Mao, Malcolm X, and other civil rights activists; he began to fight back against the unjust punishments he faced in prison.

Woodfox managed to unite groups within Angola prison to hold hunger strikes in order to get new windows or change the method of food delivery in cells. Additionally, Woodfox refused to be strip-searched, a required practice when exiting or returning to a cell for a hearing (Woodfox 2017, 152). Woodfox's open defiance of practices within Angola prison was the primary reason he was locked away in solitary for so many years.

His experiences in solitary confinement, he recalls, were meant to break him down and destroy his identity. To begin, Woodfox spent at least 23 hours a day locked inside of his solitary confinement cell, with usually less than an hour of time to exercise. He described this experience as an unrelievable pressure, being locked in a cell for almost the entire day and forced to pace around a tight, confined set of walls (Woodfox 2017, 176). Additionally, Woodfox recalls one time he was in solitary confinement, or "the dungeon" as it was sometimes referred to, and the methods of torture they had implemented, writing:

In every other way, the dungeon was the same, designed to torture prisoners, to mentally break them. They turned off the water in the sink for days at a time, so I was forced to drink water from the toilet. This was one of the most humiliating acts I ever endured while in solitary confinement. (Woodfox 2017, 168)

Woodfox recognized that experiences such as drinking water from the toilet were not meant to be practices that increased the likelihood of rehabilitation, but instead were meant to test one's ability to survive and not break down entirely. One component of life in prison that helped keep everyone "unbroken" was a rigid schedule. Woodfox writes, "As much as we hated the routine,

though, we needed it for mental stability. It gave us familiarity, a sense of confidence and the illusion of control over our surroundings” (Woodfox 2017, 177). As Foucault described, a cyclical routine encourages sameness to the point where inmates function as obedient workers with no time to do anything else. Woodfox notes that a strict daily schedule initially helped him stay active and “normal” in prison; however, whenever there was a meal delivered just a few minutes past the regular time, Woodfox recalls an overwhelming sense of anxiety and loss of control, describing it as the destruction of “a man’s logic” (Woodfox 2017, 179). Like Foucault and Guenther argue, the rigid repetition in prison can be used as a tool and a weapon. The guards are ultimately in control of the incarcerated individual’s daily routines. While Woodfox felt as though he had some control over his own life through his schedule, the guards ultimately decided when inmates would have access to resources. This consistent inconsistency within the prison resulted in Woodfox feeling constantly on the edge of insanity, waking up each morning asking himself, “Will this be the day? Will this be the day I lose my sanity and discipline? Will I start screaming and never stop? Will I curl up into a ball and become a baby, which was an early sign of going insane?” (Woodfox 2017, 220). While Woodfox was eventually freed from prison, he was not exonerated for the crime he was accused of and had to admit guilt in order to be released after over 40 years in prisons. If prisons are meant to be a rehabilitative space, why would individuals need to resist as a means of survival?

A large part of his continual fight in prison was due to the continued support from family and strangers alike while Woodfox, Robert King, and Herman Wallace were on trial for a crime they did not commit. Known as the Angola 3, Woodfox, King, and Wallace became synonymous with the fight against dehumanizing practices in prison and the corruption within the criminal justice system. There were coalitions founded in support of the Angola 3 (A3) while they spent

decades in and out of courtrooms including the National Coalition to Free the Angola 3 (Woodfox 2017, 262). Woodfox notes the overwhelming urge to continue fighting when, “For the first time in decades there were people outside prison besides our families who cared about us. People were fighting for us” (Woodfox 2017, 264). While Woodfox knew he was innocent and argued his innocence for years, hearing from people on the outside that also thought he was innocent provided Woodfox with the hope that he would be free one day. Both Davis and Woodfox had continual support from the outside that propelled them forward while in prison. Similar to Davis, Woodfox’s main purpose in Angola was to unite and educate others, thereby allowing other individuals to advocate for themselves in prison. Abbott, Davis, and Woodfox, however, used resistance as their key motive to survive time in solitary confinement.

Anytime Woodfox was able to resist, it not only gave him a sense of purpose but a unique identity, which Arendt claims is the most difficult thing to break in an individual. Woodfox writes, “Our resistance gave us identity. Our identity gave us strength. Our strength gave us an unbreakable will. My determination not to be broken was stronger than any other part of me, stronger than anything they did to me” (Woodfox 2017, 115). In Angola Woodfox actively worked to resist losing his sense of identity and relationship to others, and thereby remained “unbroken” while in prison despite the excessive violence he faced daily. As I discussed previously, Perkins notes that autobiographies provide necessary and unique accounts of time in solitary confinement that maintains an individual’s sense of self as well as document these experiences to later educate and inform others (Perkins 2000, 7).

4. Importance of First-Person Accounts/Analysis

While I do draw on a variety of philosophers to support my argument that solitary confinement is an unnecessary and dehumanizing practice that should be abolished, I believe that

there are invaluable arguments provided by first-person accounts of solitary confinement particularly for those who have not experienced solitary confinement and would not have access to this information. As I previously discussed in the section on three common intuitions about solitary confinement, much of the misunderstanding about the practice is centered around a lack of humanization of those in prison. While we may be able to identify unjust practices used in solitary confinement, first-person testimony identifies specific moral harms of solitary confinement. Additionally, my section on the history of solitary confinement in the United States provides a philosophical base for the narratives of Abbott, Davis, and Woodfox. They each have wholly unique narratives that maintain a similar underlying theme of resistance as a means of survival, asserting that solitary confinement does not aim to rehabilitate or restore the individual regardless of whether or not they are rich, white, guilty, poor, Black, or innocent. Their first-hand accounts demonstrate some of the reasons why solitary confinement should be abolished and why we as a society should remember that, as Davis states, reforming prisons only leads to a “better prison system” (2003, 105).

Section VI: Prison Abolition

In this final section I flag the dangers with reform-based approaches to address the moral harms of solitary confinement.

1. Why Reformation is Not Enough

Movements to reform the prison to ensure it no longer violates human rights only further cement the prison as a necessary institution in our society. Instead, we need to eradicate the notion that the prison is necessary for the protection and punishment of citizens. Maya Schenwar and Victoria Law critically investigate a variety of “reforms” made within our prison system that have only served to further abuse and dehumanize those in prison. For example, in recent years

Electronic Monitoring (EM) has become an increasingly popular option for individuals unable to pay bail for a pettier crime such as stealing. While bail must still be paid eventually, people are able to experience a perceived sense of freedom as they can return home to their families while using EM. Colette Payne—who struggled with a drug addiction—is one individual Schenwar and Law focus on as an example of how reformations to “improve” modes of punishment only further impede on an individual's rights (Schenwar and Law 2020, 1). While individuals would not necessarily suffer the challenges of being separated from family in jail, EM imposes severe restrictions on ones’ freedom to move, requiring they remain inside their home at all times. In Payne’s case, even taking out the trash or walking her children onto the front porch was prohibited, and while she was able to see her family, she felt more isolated. Eventually, Payne resorted to leaving her house, sometimes buying drugs, just to regain a sense of freedom (Schenwar and Law 2020, 3). For Payne, battling a heroin addiction while under the strict confines of an “alternative to incarceration” only led her back into prison rather than on the road to rehabilitation as the system is intended to do (Schenwar and Law 2020, 3).

While electronic monitoring is promoted as an opportunity for individuals to maintain connections with their communities, thereby rehabilitating the criminal faster and more effectively, there is still the strong presence of punishment and shame associated with this alternative method. The entirety of Payne’s apartment complex was alerted to the fact that she was being monitored electronically, thus publicly shaming and isolating Payne from her larger community (Schenwar and Law 2020, 2). Prisons as a whole are meant to isolate criminals from the outside world—hence the reason prisons are often located in remote, rural spaces. While electronic monitoring appears to give individuals the freedom to remain connected to their communities, it actually singles them out as “criminal” and often makes them feel rejected by

those around them. Electronic monitoring still isolates individuals from the outside world because people under EM are not physically or legally able to leave their homes. In addition, by bringing this form of punishment into households, the resulting feeling of isolation and shame is constantly present as individuals watch their families continue living their lives around them.

Schenwar and Law also point out that deterrence-based approaches such as restorative justice do not *guarantee* a positive outcome for both the victim and the aggressor. This community-based approach to accountability requires participation of individuals that understand *how* to facilitate conversations in order to have an effective version of this practice (Schenwar and Law 2020, 225). Restorative justice practices are largely reactive in educating and communicating with individuals *after* a harm has been committed rather than proactively addressing the root causes of harms. Based on descriptions from Abbott, Davis, Woodfox, and Foucault, violence is inherent within the prison. Therefore, rather than attempting to make reforms to a system that will not cease to be violent, prison abolition allows communities to direct funds and efforts elsewhere to better prevent harm.

2. Challenges of the Retributivist Approach

In addition to individuals pushing for reforms to our prison system rather than rethinking our methods of punishment altogether, there are also retributivists who believe that punishment should be grounded in blameworthiness and doled out based on the severity of the punishment itself (Kelly 2018, 17). While this retributivist approach seems “just” as it would look at individuals on a case-by-case basis to decide the punishment that is considered equal to the crime, Foucault notes the largest challenge to this methodology: how does one decide the level of blame an individual is responsible for and what punishment that then merits? Under our current criminal justice system, we would argue that the state would be in charge, but as we have seen

with our first-person accounts, the state is riddled with racist and capitalist agendas that make it impossible for punishment proportional to a crime to be doled out. Erin Kelly also points out a severe flaw in the retributivist approach in her novel *The Limits of Blame* when it is applied to criminal law. She states, “Retributivists aim to ground punishment in blameworthiness and desert, yet in criminal law, the criteria of criminal liability call for the punishment of actors who may be neither blameworthy nor deserving of punishment” (2018, 17).

Based on the retributivist point of view, we could assume that individuals want to maintain our current prisons in order to punish rapists, mass murderers, and others. Through proportional punishment they might receive a life sentence in prison and be subject to harsh conditions that many might feel is *deserved*. However, Kelly notes that factors such as intellectual ability could easily influence one’s culpability in a crime in a court of law and once again blurs the line between blameworthy and innocent (2018, 27). Individuals can claim insanity which can greatly shift the trajectory of their trial, regardless of the crime committed. Therefore, even attempts to maintain prisons in order to protect citizens from “the worst of the worst” could not be achieved equitably. Additionally, prison abolition proposes the end of the prison industrial complex, not punishment altogether, and promotes strengthening our healthcare, welfare, and education systems as a proactive means to decreasing crime rates in the United States. When considering the most equitable and sustainable solution to the problem of cruel and non-rehabilitative punishment in prisons, prison abolition is the solution.

3. Prison Abolition- The Solution

Philosopher, activist, author, professor and abolitionist Angela Davis shares the same sentiment as Schenwar and Law regarding the fundamental flaws in our prison system. As a formerly incarcerated activist herself, Davis has used her platform to raise awareness of the

dangers of the prison industrial complex. In *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Davis states, "...prison abolition requires us to recognize the extent that our present social order—in which are embedded a complex array of social problems—will have to be radically transformed" (Davis 2003, 50). Likewise, abolition is equally about tearing down as it is building back up and creating new institutions. Davis believes that blame must be utilized to hold individuals accountable. However, rather than only blaming the incarcerated individual, the blame must be reflected outward onto our larger social, economic and political structures. This, Davis states, cannot be achieved by physically destroying our prisons alone. Prison abolition requires a shift in our mindsets such that we no longer revert to prisons as the "dominant mode of punishment" (Davis 2003, 52).

Terms such as "freedom" and "democracy" have lost any consistent meaning, Davis argues, because they are used so frequently in law without any real determination of what these terms might mean within communities (Davis 2013, 61-2). In addition, throwing these terms around so effortlessly presupposes that everyone understands what they mean. I see this translating on a larger scale to a general comprehension of what is moral versus immoral in a court of law. Looking back to examples like Colette Payne, in a broader discussion about ethics and the impact of drug abuse on poorer communities her addiction, her decision to steal out of desperation may be considered morally permissible. However, in a court of law, theft is still a crime that can be punishable by anything from a slap on the wrist to life in prison depending on where you live. Recognizing that across the United States there is no consistency in how we punish locally or federally, meaning that attempting to recreate moral boundaries within our communities will do nothing to mend the fundamental inequalities that impact how our legal system functions. This does not discredit attempts to make small, immediate changes to benefit

those that are currently incarcerated, but it does emphasize how the larger goal of many Americans may not actually be to find ways to reduce crime but instead to continue cementing punishment into our society under more digestible names and programs. The longer we continue making changes to our current criminal justice system rather than questioning the foundations of that system, the more normalized prisons and punishment become in our society. Davis refers to DuBois' definition of "abolition democracy" to describe the negative effects of the abolition of slavery in the 1800s. A large part of its failure was that, while slaves were freed from their masters, they did not have access to any resources that would support their introduction into the social order in the United States. Today, we still see the lasting influences of slavery in our prison systems and risk the same fate as the abolition of slavery if we do not first create those institutions and programs to support formerly incarcerated individuals as well as all other communities (Davis 2013, 64). Moving forward, it is not the punishment we should be relying on to deter individuals from committing a crime; instead, we need to hold our institutions and our people accountable for accepting a system that functions to benefit the wealthy and white and oppress everyone else.

Over many decades there have been reformations of our prisons that have attempted to transform how we punish prisoners. Although this seemed progressive and promising to some, the fact that we still consider punishment a necessary component of the criminal justice systems suggests that we do not recognize the power we have as individuals and communities to hold one another accountable and create foundations for everyone to thrive within our country. There is no longer a fix for the prison system besides its abolition, because despite attempts to change how we punish the presence of excessive punishment will continue to exist. Therefore, we cannot look for prison reform as an opportunity to change our criminal justice system, we must abolish

the prisons and work within our own communities out into the larger society to reduce the amount of crime committed, and thereby the need for prisons altogether. Through the abolition of prisons, we could direct much more money toward community development programs, better education, access to healthcare, and many more programs that would greatly decrease the need for prisons at all.

Section VII: Conclusion

Throughout this research and writing process I have gained a deeper understanding of the practice of solitary confinement not only as punishment but also as a means of control and domination. Prior research on Angela Davis and prison abolition had prepared me well for the final section of my thesis; however, the narratives from Jack Henry Abbott and Albert Woodfox's extensive time in solitary confinement were haunting and shared just how excessive physical and mental punishment is in this practice. Nonetheless, Davis, Abbott, and Woodfox did not leave solitary confinement as law-abiding "republican machines" as Rush had intended them, but instead turned their struggle into story and helped educate others on the reality of solitary confinement in the United States.

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