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Divya Kishore March 12, 2023

Down the Hole:

The Trauma of Solitary Confinement in America's 'Bloodiest Prison'

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Abstract

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By Divya Kishore

Albert Woodfox was a man who spent almost 44 years in solitary confinement in America's 'Bloodiest Prison,' the Louisiana State Penitentiary. His identity as a Black man shaped much of his experience. He endured relentless physical and verbal abuse. This paper critically examines how to best conceptualize solitary confinement, utilizing Woodfox's experience as a means of analysis. I argue that the foundations of historical oppression and violence towards Black people in America results in severe historical trauma for Woodfox. Further, his identity as a Black man results in several instances of racially motivated violence and discrimination that compounds the psychological trauma he endures from facing physical abuse towards himself and others. It is my hope that this thesis sheds light on whether a system that utilizes solitary confinement—an experience of psychological and racial traumas—is truly rehabilitative.

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"'Instead of showing you how to build courage,' I wrote in response to someone asking me how to be brave, 'I write to you to pay tribute to and salute your courage. I embrace your courage. I lie down every night loving your courage. When I am in need of purpose of focus I thank your courage. Courage is not an ongoing thing that you walk around feeling every day. Like anything in life, it comes and goes with the challenges we meet every day of our lives!'"

—Albert Woodfox, *Solitary: Unbroken by four decades in solitary confinement. A story of hope and transformation.*

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Introduction

The cell is six feet by nine feet. He spends 23 hours a day, seven days a week pacing the cold metal floor. If he's lucky, the TV will be loud enough that he can hear it from his cell. If he's unlucky, the prison guards might gas his tier, leaving his eyes watering for the next three days. The one hour he is allowed out, he can shower for 15 minutes, all while three prison guards sit at their desks watching him through the clear cubicle. He can try to exercise on the small field outside, but some days his back is too stiff and muscles too weak from being restrained to do more than walk. He spends his nights waking every hour in a cold sweat. For a little over four decades, this was the life of Albert Woodfox. In 1965, he was incarcerated at the Louisiana State Penitentiary (known as Angola). In 1972, he was wrongfully accused and convicted of the murder of Brent Miller, a prison guard at Angola. This marked the start to almost 44 years in solitary confinement, ending with his release in 2016. There is no question that his time in solitary confinement severely impacted him, but his experience is incredibly difficult to comprehend. The prison system in the United States is responsible for the isolation of more than 80,000 men, women, and children each year. America locks up individuals at a higher rate than any other country. This isolation contributes to feelings of hopelessness and despair and can leave a permanent mark. Little to no mental health support is offered behind prison walls, and individuals are left to handle their own pre-existing trauma and continued trauma by themselves. It is far past time that we tried to understand what is happening to these individuals behind bars.

The Quakers, who quickly became staunch advocates of criminal justice reform, were credited with creating the first form of solitary confinement at the Eastern Pennsylvania

Penitentiary in 1829.[1] It began as a means of providing those incarcerated with an opportunity to be isolated to reflect on what they had done wrong.[2] The time in isolation was supposed to separate the individual from temptations to commit harm and focus more singularly on their own repentance. Rooted in Christianity, it was believed that solitary confinement could bring an individual closer to God and help them see the error of their ways.[3]

The Quakers soon realized the psychological damage that solitary confinement could inflict and began to advocate for an end to its practices. "In 1842, Charles Dickens famously denounced this extended isolation as 'worse than any torture of the body'".[4] However, the rest of America quickly began to weaponize the practices of solitary confinement as a means of retribution over rehabilitation. It was the philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, who first "proposed the 'panopticon' as the ideal structure for a modern prison in the 1780s, arguing that constant surveillance would inspire discipline among the penitent. He envisioned a circle of cells in which prisoners would be completely isolated from one another, separated by high walls, but each would be visible to one guard standing in a central location, who could potentially see into every cell at any given time".[5] The constant surveillance would result in one of the most punitive systems in the world. At the first sign of any rule-breaking, be it an extra t-shirt or piece of paper in one's cell, a prison guard could move an inmate into solitary confinement, leaving the inmate with no understanding of when they could return to a normal cell. As early as 1845, Thomas

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[1] Ruth Flower, "Solitary Confinement and Quakers," Friends Committee On National Legislation, September 28, 2016, https://www.fcnl.org/updates/2016-09/solitary-confinement-and-quakers.
[2] David Polizzi, "A Very Brief History of Solitary Confinement and the Supermax Penitentiary," in *Solitary Confinement*, 1st ed., Lived Experiences and Ethical Implications (Bristol University Press, 2017), 19–30, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1t89f9n.6.
[3] Polizzi.
[4] Keramet Reiter, *23/7: Pelican Bay Prison and the Rise of Long-Term Solitary Confinement* (Yale University Press, 2018).
[5] Reiter.

Cleveland, the acting head of the prison of Rhode Island wrote the following about solitary confinement:

> "Persons who have never been deprived even of a small portion of what may be called their *normal stimulus*, for any considerable length of time, are little aware of its salutary and indispensable influence…The succession of day and night, the changing seasons through which we are constantly passing, are all in continual action upon the springs of life…so necessary to the production of moral, physical, and intellectual health".[6]

Solitary confinement has long been thought to cause psychological impacts, but little research has been done on the extent of its effects. Perhaps it is that prison administrators are in favor of ensuring that retribution takes place. The American criminal justice system was formed around four main goals—1. retribution, 2. rehabilitation, 3. deterrence, and 4. incapacitation.[7] Retribution refers to the idea that a punishment should "fit the crime" and seek vengeance for what has taken place. To be rehabilitative, there must be a restoration of the individual who committed the crime. The individual should emerge prepared to be a member of their community in a positive way. Deterrence is the idea that individuals can be convinced to not commit crimes in the future by being threatened or instilled with fear. Finally, incapacitation restricts individuals who have committed crimes so that they are physically unable to commit crimes in the future. If a rehabilitative framework is employed, it may be questionable whether solitary confinement truly meets this goal.

In her article, "Race, Criminalization, and Historical Trauma in the United States: Making the Case for a New Justice Framework," Kimberly Westcott addresses the theory of rehabilitation as it relates to justifying the continuation of prison systems. Westcott defines that

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[6] Polizzi, "A Very Brief History of Solitary Confinement and the Supermax Penitentiary."
[7] "Crimes of Misery and Theories of Punishment | New Criminal Law Review | University of California Press,", https://online.ucpress.edu/nclr/article/15/4/465/68772/Crimes-of-Misery-and-Theories-of-Punishment.

the purpose of rehabilitation is "the promotion of the successful and productive reentry and reintegration [of the incarcerated person] into the society" to "prepare a person to return to and participate in society".[8] In a prison setting, rehabilitation seeks to reorient the developmental track of an individual, to give them their best chance of successfully returning to society as a functioning, contributing member. Most systems of criminal justice in America claim that they seek to integrate theories of rehabilitation with their methods of punishment. However, Westcott is clear to emphasize that "Punishment, when centered on deterrence, retribution, and incapacitation, reinforces the notion that people cannot change".[9] Westcott rejects the notion of these theories as sufficient justification for punishment, instead emphasizing that punishment should be replaced by rehabilitation and prisons should prioritize the healing of the so-called offender. In Westcott's view, punishment in prison further activates already existing trauma—trauma that stems from an individual's previous experiences and identity. Therefore, for Westcott, the idea that punishment and rehabilitation can be intertwined is paradoxical.

Westcott evaluates this theory of rehabilitation as it relates to the prison system in America, and more specifically in New York. However, Westcott finds that most prison systems and criminal justice systems do not adhere to the framework most intended to bring about rehabilitation. She points to the parole review process as one such example, explaining that the Board determining parole is supposed to evaluate whether the incarcerated individual has demonstrated a capacity for rehabilitation and a successful reintegration into society. Instead, Westcott writes, the Board evaluates things that an incarcerated individual no longer has power over, like the nature of the crime, their conviction history, and other factors that could not have

[8] Kimberly Westcott, "Race, Criminalization, and Historical Trauma in the United States: Making the Case for a New Justice Framework," *Traumatology* 21 (2015): 273–84, https://doi.org/10.1037/trm0000048.
[9] Westcott.

changed during time in prison. Westcott advocates for the need for more programs, counseling, work experience, education, and training within prison systems in order to successfully allow incarcerated individuals a chance at rehabilitation. Essentially, while supporting the premise of the theory of rehabilitation, Westcott argues that the New York prison system is failing in its fulfillment of this theory. Therefore, she presents a new justice framework that might better uphold theories of rehabilitation. The theory of rehabilitation impacts her methodology, as she chooses to analyze the prison system through the lens of rehabilitation. Westcott uses rehabilitation as a guiding framework for her analysis, and even when she proposes a new framework, rehabilitation is integrated within this.

In her work, Westcott uses a very broad definition of trauma. While her superficial definition does not account for the intricacies of trauma and the different ways it can be brought on, her work provides valuable insight on the extent to which criminal justice systems in the United States are largely punitive. The definitions of trauma that I utilize in this thesis will be centered around both existing psychological works, as well as evidence of racial trauma rooted in institutional violence and racially motivated encounters. Albert Woodfox's identity as a Black man resulted in racial discrimination and violence being employed against him throughout his time in the criminal justice system. In America, Black individuals are incarcerated at five times the rate of white incarceration.[10] Further, Black men are 8.2 times more likely than white men (by age 32) to spend time in solitary confinement.[11] Despite the overrepresentation of Black individuals in both the general prison population and the solitary confinement population, few

[10] Ashley Nellis Ph.D, "The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparity in State Prisons," The Sentencing Project, October 13, 2021, https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/the-color-of-justice-racial-and-ethnic-disparity-in-state-prisons-the-sentencing-project/.
[11] Hannah Pullen-Blasnik, Jessica T. Simes, and Bruce Western, "The Population Prevalence of Solitary Confinement," *Science Advances* 7, no. 48 (n.d.): eabj1928, https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abj1928.

studies have been done on the impact of one's race on their experience in prison. The hyper-criminalization of individuals based on their race can have impacts on one's mental state, as "many incarcerated and formerly incarcerated adults report having experienced social/structural trauma, which can result from the cumulative stress, incarceration, sudden employment, stigma, or oppression".[12] With a better understanding of what impacts solitary confinement can have on an individual, especially while accounting for their race, we can begin to evaluate whether the carceral system is truly, as designed to be, rehabilitative. Conceptualizing the impact of solitary confinement is essential if we are to determine whether rehabilitation is possible in a system that still uses solitary confinement. A critical evaluation of the effects that solitary confinement has on an individual must be employed if we are to continue to protect its practices. Conceiving solitary confinement as an experience of psychological and racial traumas calls into question whether it is rehabilitative. Can a practice be considered rehabilitative if it allows for the perpetuation of traumas?

Currently, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5* outlines the criteria and diagnostic strategies for several mental disorders and contains a specific category devoted to "Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders."[13] Within this section, the criterion for being diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder can be found. These diagnostic criteria, as they are formally known, range from "exposure to actual or threated death, serious injury, or sexual violence" to "negative alterations in cognitions and mood associated with the traumatic event(s), beginning or worsening after the traumatic event(s) occurred."[14] The development of the DSM-5 began in 2000 and drew upon the work of several psychiatrists and researchers; it

[12] Westcott, "Race, Criminalization, and Historical Trauma in the United States."
[13] *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5* (American Psychiatric Association, 2017).
[14] *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*.

was eventually published in 2013.[15] While the DSM-5 contains significant diagnostic criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder and is widely accepted and used in the clinical world, it does not entirely account for social factors that are highly relevant. Namely, it fails to adequately control for the impact that one's racial background may have on their experiences with trauma and other stressors. Further, it does not significantly examine the role that institutions may play in altering someone's trauma. Trauma incurred through the criminal justice system and imprisonment is not named, aside from a brief mention of incarceration in a section entitled, "Other Conditions That May Be a Focus of Clinical Attention."[16]

While trauma brought on by the prison system has not been diagnostically recognized by clinicians, a larger focus must be placed on how trauma might present within the prison system and solitary confinement more specifically. Understanding trauma in this sense is essential to grasping what the impacts of solitary confinement are for prisoners. If we as a society are going to continue to condone the system of punishment we currently have in place, we must better understand what it is doing to those who endure it. We must also question what the differential impacts are, especially when considering one's identity.

In America, race is a topic of great consideration; this is even more true when discussing how institutions are structured and how they operate. The disproportionate rates of incarceration for Black men in comparison to white men is startling and calls attention to a growing racial divide. This divide not only impacts how incarcerated populations are perceived by the greater public, but also results in differential treatment behind bars. Race is deeply intertwined with socioeconomic status, which can impact one's housing and occupation immensely. Furthermore,

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[15] "Psychiatry.Org - DSM History,", https://www.psychiatry.org:443/psychiatrists/practice/dsm/about-dsm/history-of-the-dsm.
[16] *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*.

the significant history of racial violence in America and foundations of slavery that eventually culminated in a war and the Civil Rights Movement must be addressed. When Albert Woodfox was incarcerated in 1965, America was grappling with the implementation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964[17] and implications of desegregation and backlash to a movement towards economic equality across race.[18] Within the prison system, race relations were several steps behind where the country was.

In 1965, the Louisiana State Penitentiary was deeply segregated. White prisoners were split into different tiers than Black prisoners and were assigned the role of watching over Black prisoners in their duties. In a structure that considerably mimicked a slavery-era system, Black prisoners were expected to work fields of cotton and produce harvest for the prison. They were assigned roles that involved cleaning grotesque prison floors and met with discriminatory, hateful, and threatening language at every turn. Even the most violent of white prisoners were given the opportunity to advance through the punitive tiers of the system and had clear cut avenues at which they could exit solitary confinement and rejoin the general prison population. Contrastingly, Black prisoners were placed in solitary confinement for negligible instances of disobedience and given no time frame or opportunity to move out of the tier. The lives of Black prisoners were left to the will of prison guards, who were exclusively white.

Existing bodies of literature currently point to the clear racial divide that exists between the general prison population and those placed in solitary confinement. In a survey done in 2015, it was revealed that Black male prisoners make up 40 percent of the general prison population and an even more startling 45 percent of the restricted housing (solitary confinement)

[17] The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.
[18] "The Second Revolution, 1965-1980 - Civil Rights (U.S. National Park Service)," https://www.nps.gov/subjects/civilrights/secondrevolution.htm.

population.[19] According to the most recent census estimate, published in 2021, Black people make up only 13.6 percent of the total population.[20] This overrepresentation of the Black population in prison systems relates not to the fact that Black people are committing crimes at higher rates, but rather, psychological differences in the ways that offenders of different races are responded to. Offenders of color are more likely to be perceived as a violent threat: "for example, a correctional officer may be more likely to perceive contraband in a Black offender's hand than in a White offender's hand. A prison guard may also decide more quickly that a Black offender is a threat compared to a White offender, leading perhaps to increased citations for Black offenders".[21] Examining the ways in which race impacts punitive measures used in prison, like solitary confinement, is integral to the pursuit of understanding the trauma that solitary confinement may result in.

For my thesis, I argue that the uniquely harmful trauma of solitary confinement is best conceptualized as a combination of psychological and racial trauma. Psychological and racial traumas manifest themselves in interpersonal, impersonal, and structural forms. The physical symptoms that result from time spent in isolation in a solitary confinement cell are incredibly damaging—its amalgamation with experiences of racial trauma results in pain and suffering far beyond anything a human should withstand. In explicit terms, psychological and racial traumas work *together* in the confines of a 6x9 cell. These traumas are not experienced independently; rather, the combination of them both results in a severely wounding experience. As I will discuss later in the thesis, the combination of psychological and racial traumas results in pain beyond what one might experience with just *one* of these traumas.

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[19] Juleyka Lantigua-Williams, "The Influence of Race on Solitary Confinement," The Atlantic, December 5, 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/12/race-solitary-confinement/509456/.
[20] "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: United States,", https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045221.
[21] Andrea C Armstrong, "Race, Prison Discipline, and the Law" 5 (n.d.): 24.

To illustrate that solitary confinement contains an intersection of psychological and racial traumas, I examine the case study of Albert Woodfox and his time within the Louisiana State Penitentiary. His autobiography, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope,* demonstrates the severity of his experience.[22] Due to his identity as a Black man, Woodfox was subjected to racist language, degradation, and attacks throughout his encounters both in the legal system and within the walls of prison. His own narrative displays the physical symptoms brought on by solitary confinement, as he recounts several episodes of claustrophobia and experiences a complete loss of control and autonomy. His confrontations with the police and the legal system prior to his time in solitary confinement led him to believe that the criminal justice system was not built to provide him justice, but rather built to continue to oppress him and people of his racial identity. My analysis of this book requires a careful consideration of what I define both psychological trauma and racial trauma to be. After determining the parameters of these terms, I read Woodfox's narrative with a new lens. Using the criteria outlined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*, I identify how Woodfox's experiences mimic the criterion for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The DSM-5 also offers a perspective on how clinical psychologists evaluate trauma. While preserving the integral designation of physical trauma that the DSM-5 outlines, I also question how the DSM-5 does not implement social factors in its understanding of trauma. I argue that when understanding the experience of solitary confinement, an approach that rests on *both* the psychological and social factors is required.

I also explore how solitary confinement came into being and how it continues to emphasize institutionalized harm, through several sources that examine solitary confinement

[22] Woodfox, Albert, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope* (New York: Grove Press, 2019).

from its conception.[23] My thesis also explores an experience outlined in *The Visiting Room Project,* a collection of short form, videoed narratives of individuals serving life sentences in Angola. This project explores the intricacies of prison and shares the stories of the men behind its walls; it emphasizes how one's racial background can influence both their experience and reaction to prison life and solitary confinement. It also highlights the racial disparities evident in Angola.

Some may argue that Woodfox is just one person. He is one, entirely exceptional person who was resilient through his experience in solitary confinement and is unlike anyone else. My point is not that Woodfox's experience will be the experience of every single individual in solitary confinement; trauma is specific to the individual. Woodfox is, however, an incredible case study for the effects of solitary confinement over a long period of time. Historically, Albert Woodfox remains to be the person who has served the longest time in solitary confinement in the United States. Furthermore, his unique perspective as a Black man serving time in one of the worst prisons in the country emphasizes how racial trauma is embedded in these experiences. The other sources I draw upon confirm that much of Woodfox's time in solitary confinement contains experiences that are shared by those that this system impacts.

My sources, taken together, illustrate that solitary confinement is a horrific experience best conceptualized in terms of both psychological trauma and racial trauma. In Chapter one, I explore the conceptions of psychological trauma and racial trauma. Psychological trauma originated under Sigmund Freud's work with hysteria. A true understanding of posttraumatic stress disorder did not emerge until World War I. It was later solidified in academia after World War II and the Vietnam War. Posttraumatic stress disorder requires the experiencing of a

[23] Reiter, *23/7: Pelican Bay Prison and the Rise of Long-Term Solitary Confinement*.

traumatic event. Sexual abuse/violence and childhood abuse were also eventually included in the definition of a traumatic event. Eventually, the DSM began to emerge as the leading source for the diagnosis of psychological disorders. The field of study relating to psychological trauma is one of deep discontent; as Judith Herman, an American psychiatrist, writes, "The systemic study of psychological trauma therefore depends on the support of a political movement".[24] While Freud had originally dismissed hysteria as a creation of the mind, later studies indicated a deeper psychological trauma.

Chapter one also includes my definition of racial trauma that accounts for the implications of slavery, Reconstruction, and the Civil Rights Movement. I examine the ways in which slavery was replaced by a system of mass incarceration disproportionately impacting Black individuals. I argue for the legitimization of racial trauma to allow for a better conceptualization of solitary confinement. This section also accounts for the idea of historical trauma passed through generations.

Developing an understanding of how psychological trauma can function on an interpersonal level is integral to the structure of Chapter two. This chapter explores how physical abuse manifests as a result of racially motivated attacks. Further, it uncovers the impact of racially motivated verbal abuse and the degree to which it can cause trauma. It also examines traumatic responses to solitary confinement, evidenced through Woodfox's experience of claustrophobia, anxiety, and hypervigilance, symptoms that all develop within his first month of solitary confinement. In Chapter three, I explore institutional violence as it relates to race and the structure of prison systems in America. There is a structural element of the prison system that perpetuates racial segregation within its walls. While Chapter two explores encounters between

[24] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (Pandora, 2015).

individuals and prison guards, Chapter three questions how the racially different impact of solitary confinement is evidenced further through structure and not solely the individual. In America, white individuals unknowingly participate in a racialized system. Within the criminal justice system, this racialized aspect is further evidenced. Through the system of trial by jury and power dynamics that exist between police forces, judges, and guards superior to the individual who commits a crime, the legal system itself commits harm.

The Louisiana State Penitentiary itself is a perfect case study of the ways that institutionalized violence has become accepted in America. The administration is composed through a family legacy that is regularly at odds with federal entities, leaving the individuals incarcerated within it in limbo as tensions between these two grow. Its roots as a slave plantation also influence its composition and practices. Institutions like Angola leave incarcerated individuals with no control and immense feelings of hopelessness. Institutionalized violence greatly impacts the experience of trauma as it moves beyond the individual and into society. The differential impact of institutionalized violence pours into all areas, leaving marginalized individuals to meet it at every turn.

In Chapter four, I question how solitary confinement should be understood in the context of multiple traumas—psychological and racial in nature. The trauma of solitary confinement is not directly explored in the DSM-5 and other clinically recognized sources. Further, racial trauma is still not clinically recognized and the criteria for evaluation has yet to be standardized. However, for the effects of solitary confinement to be truly understood, these categories of trauma must be considered together. Ultimately, I argue for a biopsychosocial approach in evaluating solitary confinement. By using Albert Woodfox as a case study, the long-term impacts that solitary confinement can have are revealed. Examining its manifestations as both

psychological trauma and racial trauma is the first step in evaluating solitary confinement as a punitive practice in America. Given that solitary confinement is a practice that results in trauma, is it truly rehabilitative? Does its existence necessitate the introduction of trauma-informed care within prison settings? These questions are important to reckon with as we evaluate the effectiveness of the criminal justice system and consider the future of incarceration in America.

As I later conclude, solitary confinement must be conceptualized in terms of psychological *and* racial trauma. Woodfox's narrative will ultimately demonstrate the ways in which these two types of traumas intertwine in a uniquely harmful way. Solitary confinement causes immense debilitation and negative impacts for the individuals who experience it; it is far past time that this was recognized. There are several similarities between Woodfox's symptoms that result from his prison experience and the symptoms that are associated with posttraumatic stress disorder. Additionally, due to his racial identity, background, and the time he grew up during, Woodfox is exposed to racial trauma and its effects. Woodfox's time in prison uncovers the miscarriages of justice occurring behind closed doors, and calls attention to a growing need for oversight and reform.

Chapter One: Conceptions of Trauma

Trauma as a term has been widely contested. Clinicians have cautioned of the overuse of trauma in diagnosing individuals; they worry that the overuse of trauma will invalidate the experience of those with what they determine to be *actual* trauma. In an article published in the New York Times, Jessica Bennett asked, "If Everything Is 'Trauma,' Is Anything?".[25] She argued that while trauma was originally conceived as a way to describe physical injury, "today it's more commonly expressed in the context of the emotional".[26] The recognition of trauma beyond physical injury helped to legitimize psychological torment that came in the form of sexual, childhood, and domestic abuse. She points to the advent of social media as the reason that trauma has now evolved to be used in the most minute contexts—like when someone gets their feelings hurt or faces some relationship burden. She also questions the medicalization of trauma in the emotional context. She writes, "There are plenty of horrible things going on in the world, and serious mental health crises that warrant such severe language. But when did we start using the language of harm to describe, well, everything?".[27] Bennett correctly cautions individuals in their use of trauma and the consequences of dubbing *everything* as traumatic. She exhibits the same caution seen in the development of the DSM by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). While these concerns are legitimate and should be considered when adopting new definitions and uses of trauma, certain circumstances require such language in order to be given the appropriate response. In this chapter, I create my own conception of both psychological and racial trauma, drawing on existing literature. These definitions will prove to be integral in

[25] Jessica Bennett, "Opinion | If Everything Is 'Trauma,' Is Anything?" *The New York Times*, February 4, 2022, sec. Opinion, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/04/opinion/caleb-love-bombing-gaslighting-trauma.html.
[26] Bennett.
[27] Bennett.

my analysis of solitary confinement and Albert Woodfox's experience in it. Additionally, I will outline the ways in which these traumas result.

Section 1: Psychological Trauma

The 19th century saw the origination of a conception of psychological trauma. Jean Martin Charcot, a French pathologist, worked at L'Hôpital Salpêtrière in Paris. The hospital was fondly remembered by Charcot as the "grand asylum of human misery".[28] It was this grand asylum that became the center stage for Charcot's work on a disease he termed "hysteria" in which women exhibited convulsions and episodes of fainting. He would display these women as they experienced these physical symptoms to the public, hoping to decipher what was causing these women to act in such a way. Many had reduced hysteria to women attempting to seek attention or malingering, but Charcot coined it as hysteria, and believed he could determine a direct cause. He employed hypnosis to try and "fix" these afflicted women and displayed how they could suddenly become obedient and unaffected by pain.[29] Charcot had no real evidence for the claims he was making but was still able to convince his peers of the merit of his work. His teachings largely inspired a young student who would later be considered the father of modern psychology—Sigmund Freud.

Freud's early career focused entirely on hysteria and initially, he believed that hysteria was rooted in trauma. Greatly influenced by Charcot, Freud believed that the patients had the capability of misleading their doctors on their experiences. In one of his most famous works, "The Aetiology of Hysteria", he writes, "we should feel less dependent on the assertions of the

[28] Manni Waraich and Shailesh Shah, "The Life and Work of Jean-Martin Charcot (1825–1893): 'The Napoleon of Neuroses,'" *Journal of the Intensive Care Society* 19, no. 1 (February 2018): 48–49, https://doi.org/10.1177/1751143717709420.
[29] "In Search of Hysteria: The Man Who Thought He Could Define Madness," *Literary Hub* (blog), September 20, 2019, https://lithub.com/in-search-of-hysteria-the-man-who-thought-he-could-define-madness/.

patients themselves. A dermatologist, for instance, is able to recognize a sore as luetic from the character of its margins, or the crust on it and of its shape, without being misled by the protestations of his patient".[30] Freud believed that the originations of hysteria could be brought back to a singular traumatic event. Building upon the work of Josef Breuer, a physician who worked in neurophysiology and focused on psychoanalysis, Freud outlined a treatment for patients with hysteria in which they "lead the patient's attention back from his symptom to the scene in which and through which that symptom arose; and, having thus located the scene, we remove the symptom by bringing about, during the reproduction of the traumatic scene, a subsequent correction of the psychical course of events which took place at the time".[31] Freud believed that this was the therapeutical cure that had been missing all along. He went on to further qualify how hysterical symptoms could be brought on; two conditions were required of the traumatic scene. It only meets his criteria "if it possesses the relevant suitability to serve as a determinant and if recognizably possesses the necessary traumatic force".[32] The traces of psychological trauma that the DSM-5 currently recognizes loosely originate from Freud's conception. Freud was the first to point to a traumatic "memory" as carrying enough weight to spark physical symptoms, however he has been widely criticized for his response to hysteria. There was great fear about what consequences his findings might result in.

When World War I broke out in 1914, Freud was deep into his work with hysteria. He soon began working with combat veterans. Initially, these individuals were written off as maligners who were feigning neuroses to avoid continuing fighting. In 1920, however, Freud published *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, after the war had concluded. It was in this work that

[30] Sigmund Freud, "The Aetiology of Hysteria," May 1896, http://staferla.free.fr/Freud/Freud%20complete%20Works.pdf.
[31] Freud.
[32] Freud.

Freud began to examine war neuroses in depth. He found that war neuroses functioned in a way that was quite parallel to how hysteria symptoms did—they were fundamentally rooted in memory. While Freud did not believe that people were constantly plagued by memories, he did find that "dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright". Freud's understanding of war neuroses gave way to a conception of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). While PTSD was only formally added in 1980 to the third iteration of the DSM, its origins dated back to Freud's early work. During World War I, a type of traumatic neurosis known as shell shock emerged. Again, many believed that feigning shell shock was the best way for individuals to get out of combat; shell shock would render individuals mute and unable to function. It was believed that, as Sandor Ferenczi, a leading psychoanalyst said, "the symptoms of the terror, such as the immovable legs, the tremblings, the hesitating speech, seem to be useful automatisms; one is reminded by them of certain animals which simulate being dead when danger threatens".[33] Shell shock was one of the earliest indicators that traumatic events could continue to have a lasting impact beyond the event. Building upon his earlier work with hysteria, Freud developed the "talking cure" designed to delve into traumatic memories and interpret them.

By the time America entered the Vietnam War, combat trauma was recognized, but the mechanisms of it remained unknown. The Vietnam War prompted the simultaneous politicization and medicalization of trauma; many were arguing against continuing the war largely because of the adverse effects they had experienced through the war. At the same time, America was reckoning with how to respond to the significant mental impacts that the war had

[33] Chris Eagle, *Dysfluencies: On Speech Disorders in Modern Literature* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

had on countless individuals. Individuals coined the term "Post-Vietnam Syndrome" to refer to the psychological aftermath of the war.[34] The political context of the Vietnam War greatly impacted the country's response to combat veterans returning home. Gone were the parades and celebrations of WWI and WWII. Instead, veterans were left to fend for themselves and cope with the barrage of guilt, shame, and trauma in their heads. The war impacted individuals' ability to engage with regular society; "Having learned to function in a world without morality and humanity, they now found it difficult to relate to ordinary people, to have ordinary feelings. They suffered from depression, anxiety, and nightmares".[35] The trauma that these individuals had experienced during the war had altered their sense of self and their identities. They were deeply scarred by what they had witnessed and what they had done. While Freud's psychoanalysis had been prominent in 1952 and 1968 when the DSM-1 and DSM-2, respectively, were published, by the time of the Vietnam War, the American Psychiatric Association "entrusted the revision of the DSM to a 'task force' dominated by 'biological' psychiatrists".[36] These psychiatrists recognized the need to categorize war-related stress, but did not believe initially that a separate classification for diagnosis was necessary. The politicization of the Vietnam War resulted in combat veterans taking to the media to advocate for a careful diagnosis of the trauma they were experiencing. Thus, posttraumatic stress disorder was born.

Today, posttraumatic stress disorder remains as a category in the DSM-5 but has been adapted slightly from its early conceptions in the DSM-3. The DSM-3 diagnosis of PTSD "addressed immediate symptoms following combat experiences, rape, domestic violence, and child abuse; symptoms were then categorized along four clusters: intrusive reexperiencing,

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[34] Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists, 1914-1994* (Pimlico, 2002).
[35] Shephard.
[36] Shephard.

avoidance, hyperarousal, and hypervigilance".[37] Notably, the DSM-3 did not account for an individual's early development or external stressors that could impact how posttraumatic stress disorder presents. Now, in the DSM-5, posttraumatic stress disorder can be found in the category "Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders" while it was previously found in the "Anxiety Disorders" category. The changes from the DSM-3 to the DSM-5 do not appear to impact the prevalence of PTSD, however, it does include changes that may alter one's initial diagnosis.[38] Currently, the diagnostic Criterion A for PTSD in the DSM-5 requires "Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways: 1. Directly experiencing the traumatic event(s). 2. Witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others. 3. Learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend…4. Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s)…".[39] The determinations for what qualifies as a traumatic event were altered between the DSM-5 and its earlier versions; initially, traumatic events were expected to be major, life-threatening events, but the "more recent DSM-5 revisions allow it to be satisfied by both high magnitude catastrophic events…and lower magnitude events that are indirectly experienced".[40] However, the DSM continues to be critiqued for ambiguity in which individuals could argue several things worthy of a PTSD diagnosis. In earlier iterations of the DSM, most specifically within the DSM-4, an individual's response to a traumatic event required experiencing "intense

[37] Jerrold Brandell, *Trauma: Contemporary Directions in Trauma Theory, Research, and Practice*, 2nd ed. (Columbia University Press, 2019).
[38] Lori A. Zoellner et al., "The Evolving Construct of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): DSM-5 Criteria Changes and Legal Implications," *Psychological Injury and Law* 6, no. 4 (December 1, 2013): 277–89, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12207-013-9175-6.
[39] *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*.
[40] Zoellner et al., "The Evolving Construct of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)."

fear, helplessness, or horror"[41]—this criterion has since been removed in the DSM-5 due to questions about its utility.

With the advent of combat trauma post-Vietnam war, the DSM also saw expansions in the areas of childhood abuse and sexual violence. Early work on hysteria resulted in an incredibly gendered approach to trauma; experiences of hysteria among women were made public spectacles and initial reports of trauma among male veterans were scoffed at and men were told to "toughen up". In her book, *Aftermath,* Susan Brison describes her experience with sexual assault and the trauma she faced in its aftermath. Of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual,* she writes that posttraumatic stress disorder is defined "in part, as the result of 'an event that is outside the range of usual human experience.' Because the trauma is, to most people, inconceivable, it's also unspeakable".[42] Brison valued her diagnosis of PTSD, as she felt it gave legitimacy to the feelings she was experiencing and helped her stay grounded with a tangible reason why she was feeling the way she was.

As mentioned earlier, the DSM-5 categorizes posttraumatic stress disorder into the "Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders" category. This grouping is noted to be due to the fact that each disorder necessitates the exposure to a traumatic or stressful event. Psychiatrists agree that of the disorders outlined in the DSM-5, posttraumatic stress disorder is the most widely contested; simultaneously, it is one of the most expansive in its range of diagnostic criteria. Within the diagnostic features, authors note that "The clinical presentation of PTSD varies. In some individuals, fear-based reexperiencing, emotional, and behavioral symptoms may predominate. In others, anhedonic or dysphoric mood states and negative cognitions may be most distressing. In some individuals, arousal and reactive-externalizing symptoms are

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[41] Zoellner et al.
[42] Susan Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton University Press, 2003).

prominent, while in others, dissociate symptoms predominate. Finally, some individuals exhibit combinations of these symptom patterns".[43] The DSM-5 correctly recognizes that trauma is not universal. Psychological trauma is specific to the individual; furthermore, two individuals could experience the same traumatic event and not necessarily both be diagnosed with PTSD if they react to it differently.

The DSM-5 outlines what qualifies as traumatic events fulfilling Criterion A in the Diagnostic Features section. It details "exposure to war as a combatant or civil, threatened or actual physical assault…threatened or actual sexual violence…being kidnapped, being taken hostage, terrorist attack, torture, incarceration as a prisoner of war, natural or human-made disasters, and severe motor vehicle accidents"[44] as potential experiences. While it notes that this is not an exhaustive list of potential traumatic events, researchers do believe that this list is representative of typical events. Notably, incarceration as a prisoner of war is included, while incarceration and its practices are not.

With the continual adaptation of definitions of psychological trauma, it can be difficult to parse out the symptoms of trauma that are most relevant, while ensuring that trauma is not universalized or overly diagnosed. Ultimately, psychological trauma and more specifically, posttraumatic stress disorder, require the experiencing of a traumatic event. While the traumatic event does not guarantee the development of psychological trauma, coupled with the other criterion of the DSM-5, it could. The DSM-5 outlines possible symptoms in Criterion A-H. Criterion B relates to the recurrence of memories associated with the traumatic event. Criterion C involves the continual avoidance of memories and reminders of the traumatic event, and Criterion D requires negative alterations in mood evidenced at least two different ways. The

[43] *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*.
[44] *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*.

inclusion of Criterion D was seen in the shift from the DSM-4 to DSM-5. Criterion E requires at least two alterations in arousal and reactivity in association with the traumatic event and Criterion F requires that Criterion B-E last more than one month. Criterion G outlines that the symptoms must cause "clinically significant distress or impairment" and Criterion H says that these symptoms cannot be attributed to substances like drugs or alcohol, nor can it be attributed to an existing medical condition.[45]

The DSM-5 remains a significant source for clinicians and researchers in diagnosing posttraumatic stress disorder. Due to its significance, it must be included in discussions of psychological trauma and must be referred to when considering new populations that may be at risk of developing posttraumatic stress disorder. This brief overview of the origination of trauma theory and diagnosable trauma illustrates the growing body of work and research associated with the topic. Understanding the definition of psychological trauma that scholars use is operative to considering the experience of individuals within solitary confinement who may be prone to developing symptoms and may be at risk of severe trauma.

Section 2: Racial Trauma

In this thesis, an understanding of psychological trauma and the definitions in clinical use today is essential. However, of equal importance is an understanding of racial trauma. In Albert Woodfox's experience, instances of racial trauma pervade his time involved with the criminal justice system and predominantly his time in prison. The racial trauma that Woodfox experiences is largely a *result of an identity*—a racial identity. When considering mass incarceration, race is a crucial element. In America, there exists a large racial disparity within prisons. In 12 states, including Louisiana (where Woodfox was imprisoned), more than half of the prison population is

[45] *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*.

Black.[46] In Louisiana, Black individuals only make up 33.0% of the general population.[47] The cycle of imprisonment impacts Black individuals more than any other racial group. Additionally, Louisiana disproportionately imposes life sentences onto individuals; there are more people serving life sentences without parole than those in Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Texas taken together.[48]

In this section, I will outline the implications of slavery, Reconstruction, Jim Crow era laws, and the Civil Rights Movement, to better understand the rise of mass incarceration as we know it today. This background is essential in understanding both the origins of racial trauma and the culmination of a system of racism that allowed for the conditions within the Louisiana State Penitentiary. Many scholars today call mass incarceration the response to the abolition of slavery— "the latest in a series of institutions created to enforce the racial hierarchy in the United States".[49] I draw attention to the fact that America is built upon the foundation of slavery, a mode of oppression and brutality against Black people that existed for many years.

In trauma studies, there is a severe lack of understanding around racial based stress that individuals may experience. Unfortunately, "the notion that racism is a stressor that can harm or injure its targets is not recognized in psychological or psychiatric diagnostic systems".[50] The experience of racial violence is not understood as significant enough to be considered a traumatic event as outlined by the DSM-5, despite meeting several of the criterion for posttraumatic stress

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[46] Ph.D, "The Color of Justice."
[47] "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Louisiana,", https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/LA.
[48] "Louisiana's Infamous Angola Prison Goes on Trial | News & Commentary," *American Civil Liberties Union* (blog), October 18, 2018, https://www.aclu.org/news/prisoners-rights/louisianas-infamous-angola-prison-goes.
[49] Aaron Gottlieb and Kalen Flynn, "The Legacy of Slavery and Mass Incarceration: Evidence from Felony Case Outcomes," *Chicago Journals: Social Service Journal* 95, no. 1, https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/713922.
[50] Robert T. Carter et al., "Initial Development of the Race-Based Traumatic Stress Symptom Scale: Assessing the Emotional Impact of Racism," *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* 5, no. 1 (January 2013): 1–9, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025911.

disorder. The definition of racial trauma is widely contested in the academic field; it is also known to many in different terms: *historical trauma, race-based trauma, racially motivated trauma,* and *race-based stress.* For the purposes of this thesis, I will understand racial trauma as the trauma resulting from a history of oppression coupled with the experience of continued discrimination and violence that is racially motivated. It is, thus, essential to grasp the history of brutality in America, to better understand what precedes racial trauma.

As early as 1719, French colonizers in Louisiana imported African enslaved people to work their lands.[51] Slavery became prominent across America; Africans were seen as less than human and therefore used as laborers to cultivate crops for trade purposes. The conditions in which Africans were imported to America were horrific. They were left starving and in pain, beaten into subservience. Between 1718 and 1735, almost 7,000 Africans reached Louisiana. By 1735, the Black population in Louisiana was only 3,400.[52] Black individuals were viewed as disposable; no worry or concern was exhibited for their living conditions. Instead, white colonizers sought to maximize their profits and viewed African slaves as their means of doing so. As Africans were subject to more and more cruel conditions, they began to run away, leading Louisiana colonizers to institute punishments of whipping and physical marking. This reinforced the racial hierarchy of white people being on top, and Black people remaining in servitude to them, with no means of improving their social status. This lay the foundation for years of oppression that would take its toll on the African American population.

When Abraham Lincoln was elected president of the United States in November of 1860, many Southern states immediately moved to secede from the Union. Governor Thomas Overton

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[51] Daniel H. Usner, "From African Captivity to American Slavery: The Introduction of Black Laborers to Colonial Louisiana," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 20, no. 1 (1979): 25–48.
[52] Usner.

Moore of Louisiana held a convention to vote on secession, and in January 1861, in a vote of 113 to 17, the delegates voted to secede and join the Confederacy.[53] Louisiana was a battleground state during the Civil War. Nearly 24,000 African Americans from Louisiana fought on behalf of the Union in the Civil War.[54] Despite the Confederacy's attempts to frame the Civil War as a battle for state's rights, the war was largely over the right to own slaves. On January 1, 1863, almost two years after Louisiana seceded from the Union, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, effectively freeing all slaves.[55] Louisiana, however, would remain in the Confederacy for two more years, though its ties would remain lasting far beyond that.

Finally, in 1865, the Civil War ended. President Lincoln proposed a plan in which 10 percent of the male population in Confederate states had to swear loyalty to the Union and acknowledge the end of slavery. Only then were these states readmitted into the Union. Following the end of the war, Southern states were in shambles. Louisiana's sugar cane was entirely decimated. Prior to the Civil War, Louisiana was responsible for the enslavement of over 300,000 people (in 1860).[56] With the end of the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, formerly enslaved individuals were forced to participate in a system of convict leasing, the state's closest replacement for slavery. Under this system, formerly enslaved people were paid minimal amounts (typically in the form of housing and food) and were still at the will of their former masters.[57] Formerly enslaved people were still seen as inferior.

Additionally, Southern states instated Jim Crow, a means of enforcing racial segregation. Black people were prevented from voting through measures like poll taxes and the grandfather

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[53] "Civil War Louisiana," 64 Parishes, https://64parishes.org/entry/civil-war-louisiana.
[54] "Civil War Louisiana."
[55] "The Emancipation Proclamation," National Archives, October 6, 2015, https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation.
[56] "Chart: Slave Population in 1860," Bill of Rights Institute, https://billofrightsinstitute.org/activities/chart-slave-population-in-1860/.
[57] Westcott, "Race, Criminalization, and Historical Trauma in the United States."

clause[58], and thus had no means of securing political freedom for themselves. Slavery had once existed under social acceptance; no one questioned the subjugation of an entire race of people for very long. The consistent discrimination that pervaded society even after the Civil War and the abolition of slavery resulted in severe trauma for certain populations.

Many Southern states also implemented what was known as the 'Black Codes', a system of punishment in which Black individuals could be imprisoned and then leased out to former enslavers. The criteria for imprisonment ranged from breaking curfew to vagrancy (being without employment or income). Vagrancy refers to a person appearing to be homeless or unemployed. After the end of the Civil War, newly freed Black people found it difficult to get jobs, and often did not have permanent homes due to much of their family being displaced from slavery. The criminalization of Black people was only perpetuated by vagrancy laws. In Louisiana specifically, the criminal code of 1855 defined vagrants as "'all idle persons' who live 'wandering abroad' without 'visible means to maintain themselves'".[59] Vagrancy became a way for Black individuals to be criminalized under the law, forcing their entrance into the criminal justice system. In his memoir, Woodfox recognized the implications of vagrancy laws. Even as a child in the 1950s, he was acutely aware of the motive behind them. He writes, "Most of the policemen were white in those days. They came through our neighborhood picking up black men for standing on the corner, charging them with loitering or vagrancy, looking to meet their quota of arrests…We always knew the police picked up the men in our neighborhood because they

[58] Alan Greenblatt, "The Racial History Of The 'Grandfather Clause,'" *NPR*, October 22, 2013, sec. Code Switch: Word Watch, https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/10/21/239081586/the-racial-history-of-the-grandfather-clause.
[59] John K. Bardes, "Redefining Vagrancy: Policing Freedom and Disorder in Reconstruction New Orleans, 1862–1868," *The Journal of Southern History* 84, no. 1 (February 2018): 69–112.

were black and for no other reason".[60] Despite the emergence of vagrancy laws over a hundred years prior, they remained prominent and impactful.

In 1866, Louisiana was subject to military occupation under what was known as Radical Reconstruction.[61] Two years later, Black men were technically enfranchised, though they would not get to utilize that right for quite some time. Radical Reconstruction was not met well in Louisiana. White individuals resorted to violence in any extent to re-exert their control over newly freed Black people. "According to the most plausible tallies, lynching claimed at least 355 black lives between 1882 and 1952, a total second only to Mississippi as a proportion of population".[62] The biggest city in Louisiana, Shreveport, was known for being one of the most intolerant cities in the South. Coined a breeding ground for the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), a white supremacist group, Shreveport was home to racism in its purest form.[63]

In the early 1900s, Black mobility was limited. In 1915, less than half of the Black children in Louisiana attended school; instead, they bore witness to violence in the streets and a racial reckoning occurring across the South.[64] In attempts to attend school and engage in other areas of society, Black individuals were met with brutality. During the night, Black homes were vandalized and burned. White Klansmen took to the streets, lynching Black individuals for any reason they could think of. These Klansmen were prominent members of society—government officials, judges, lawyers—and kept their identities hidden to avoid prosecution. If they were

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[60] Woodfox, Albert, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope*.
[61] Marek D. Steedman, "Resistance, Rebirth, and Redemption: The Rhetoric of White Supremacy in Post-Civil War Louisiana," *Historical Reflections* 35, no. 1 (March 2009): 97–113, https://doi.org/10.3167/hrrh2009.350106.
[62] Adam Fairclough, *Race & Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1995).
[63] Fairclough.
[64] Fairclough.

discovered, they were protected by their societal roles and allowed free reign to wreak violence on Black communities.

Victories for Black individuals in Louisiana were few and far between. In 1927, the New Orleans chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) won a hard-fought trial of a white man who killed a fourteen-year-old Black girl when she refused his sexual advances.[65] While the man was initially sentenced to death, only nine years later he was granted another trial. Even when legal success did occur, it rarely translated into the day to day lives of Black individuals. Segregation defined the era of Jim Crow. Black individuals were prevented from integrating with whites in school systems, restaurants, stores, and even water fountains. Continually, leaders were elected who supported—or refused to question—the ideals of white supremacy. Expectedly, "virtually every southern politician exploited the prejudices of the white electorate, reasoning that if they did not, their opponents would".[66] Government leaders used explicit terms like "n*gger[67]" and "coon" to discuss Black individuals. There were no attempts to mask the racism and hatred held for Blacks in the South.

Any attempts made by Black individuals to improve their social standing were met with violence. If Black individuals tried to vote, they were beaten outside the courthouse while the sheriff stood to the side and watched. In the early 1930s, the number of lynchings increased significantly. The idea that Black individuals could not trust the law enforcement and criminal justice system in place was reinforced by the participation of sheriffs in lynchings. This "was the most chilling evidence of their power over Blacks. Blacks were usually lynched because sheriffs

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[65] Fairclough.
[66] Fairclough.
[67] For the purposes of this thesis, I will refer to the n-word as "n*gger" even when utilizing direct quotes. I recognize the significance of this word, used as both a term of degradation and brutality, as well as one reclaimed with power. Furthermore, I recognize that this is not *my* word to use. However, I wish to preserve the authenticity of what Woodfox conveys, and the significance of this word in contributing to racial violence in the way that it is used against him.

allowed them to be, in some cases permitting mobs to enter jails, at other times meekly surrendering prisoners to the mob before they ever reached the jail".[68] Fear was instilled in the hearts of every single Black person living in Louisiana in the 1900s. The existence of Jim Crow and continued perpetuation of violence left Black individuals feeling hopeless and unable to reconcile their desire for protection with the system in place.

Through the 1900s, a movement was brewing. Several events occurred that reinforced that the brutality, violence, and oppression was not going away anytime soon. In 1947, nine Black teens, aged 12 to 19, were on a train in Alabama. Eventually known as the Scottsboro Boys, these children were accused of raping two white women on the train. Despite no physical evidence of rape, not all the defendants being on the car, and one of the women recanting her testimony, the boys[69] were found guilty and sentenced to death.[70] The case displayed a severe miscarriage of justice. Following this case, there was national outrage amongst Black communities. People could no longer pretend that there was justice in a system that was so broken it could sentence children to death with no evidence.

The violence taking place in both the court system and on the street was on national display. Leaders of civil rights organizations hoped to call attention to the unjustness taking place. The most key example of this was the brutal murder in 1955 of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old boy who was visiting his relatives in Mississippi. Being from the North, he had not understood the role that segregation played in the South and the standards in place for communicating with white people, particularly white women. Emmett Till made a comment towards a white woman

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[68] Fairclough, *Race & Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972*.
[69] The ninth defendant was a 14-year-old boy named Roy Wright. Due to his age, prosecutors only pursued a life sentence, but seven of the jurors sought the death penalty for the child.
[70] "The Saga of The Scottsboro Boys," American Civil Liberties Union, https://www.aclu.org/issues/racial-justice/saga-scottsboro-boys.

in a store. Hours later, her husband and brother-in-law kidnapped him from his home, beat him, brutally murdered him, and then dumped his body in the Tallahatchie River.

At the request of Till's mother, his funeral was publicized on national television for the world to see. He was placed in an open casket so that everyone could see what the two white men had done to his body. The magazine *JET* ran photos of the open casket and covered the trial of the two men.[71] During the trial, despite hearing countless witnesses testify about Emmett being kidnapped in the middle of the night, an all-white jury took less than one hour to find both defendants not guilty. This time, the world was watching.

The continual exposure to racial violence undeniably resulted in immense psychological trauma for those forced to witness it. Today, violence exists within our systems in a manner not dissimilar from the violence that existed 100 years ago. However, today it comes in the form of police killings of Black Americans, and the advent of social media has contributed to a wider dispersion of videos and recordings of police violence. While the research on the impacts of witnessing police killings on Black Americans remains sparse, there is a clear correlation between adverse mental health outcomes and greater exposure to racial violence. In her article, "'After Philando, I Had to Take a Sick Day to Recover': Psychological Distress, Trauma and Police Brutality in the Black Community", Deion S. Hawkins examines the ways in which police brutality impacts the mental health of Black Americans. She defines police brutality as any act "that harms, dehumanizes or degrades its target" noting that "brutality *does not require intent;* dehumanization and degradation can occur in the absence of intent".[72] Police brutality occurs

[71] "The Murder of Emmett Till | Articles and Essays | Civil Rights History Project | Digital Collections | Library of Congress," web page, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA, https://www.loc.gov/collections/civil-rights-history-project/articles-and-essays/murder-of-emmett-till/.
[72] Deion S. Hawkins, "'After Philando, I Had to Take a Sick Day to Recover': Psychological Distress, Trauma and Police Brutality in the Black Community," *Health Communication* 37, no. 9 (July 29, 2022): 1113–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2021.1913838.

disproportionately towards Black individuals and harms, dehumanizes, and degrades in the same way that racially motivated violence, like that done towards Emmett Till, does.

Racial trauma can be brought on by pure exposure to racial violence, coupled with the traumatic impacts of historical experiences from past generations. Racial trauma can also present in the understanding of oppression and brutality that African Americans were forced to endure. Knowing that the system one relies on was founded on these principles can leave individuals feeling unprotected and hopeless, with no power to stand against such oppression. Judith Herman, in her definition of psychological trauma, notes that it is "an affliction of the powerless; when trauma occurs, the victim is rendered helpless".[73] When exposed to racial violence via social media or national news networks, one is rendered helpless. The only option is to watch with bated breath as the violence continues. Under a lens of critical race theory, race and racism are re-examined to place greater emphasis on the "subtle and systemic ways…Anti-Blackness operates".[74] Miscarriages of justice—like the Scottsboro Boys case and the murder of Emmett Till—are instances in which harm towards the entire Black community is perpetuated. These miscarriages of justice emphasized the history of oppression combined with racially motivated violence that resulted in racial trauma. Black individuals were faced with *both* racial trauma and the psychological trauma that resulted from witnessing these horrific events.

In Hawkins' study, she asks participants to describe their feelings after viewing videos or images of events classified as police brutality. One respondent stated, "'Bro, I am not even a crier, but shit, seeing people who look like you, your friends, your family (pause)…constantly get killed without punishment. Of course, it gets to you. I'm human bro (pause)…So, yea…I

[73] Hawkins.
[74] Hawkins.

cried'".[75] This respondent is not alone in his reaction. A large motivation behind Emmett Till's open casket was so that people would feel immense sadness at seeing one of their own violated in such a brutal way and be prompted to act. Today, it is recognized that events of police brutality have severe emotional and physiological effects. "Witnessing or experiencing harassment, routine unwarranted searches, and deaths that go unpunished send a message to Black communities that their bodies are police property, disposable, and undeserving of dignity and justice".[76] Even though there is a lack of academic research published through the era of Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Movement, the violence and oppression that Black Americans were forced to face every single day parallels, if not exceeds, police brutality; it caused severe mental damage. Having to fear for their families, friends, and community each time they stepped out the door, not knowing if they would be criminalized for walking on the street or looking at a white woman in the wrong way.

While not every member of the Black community would experience psychological trauma that resulted from direct incidents, all members were susceptible to the negative impacts of racial trauma that resulted from a history of oppression. In Albert Woodfox's case, his racial identity resulted in discrimination and violence—racial trauma. However, experiencing physical abuse and witnessing other forms of abuse also impacted him psychologically. These two types of traumas worked together to create a uniquely harmful experience.

Albert Woodfox's own understanding of race relations developed from a young age. Born in New Orleans in 1947, Woodfox was exposed to the racial segregation of Jim Crow. He

[75] Hawkins.
[76] Sirry Alang et al., "Police Brutality and Black Health: Setting the Agenda for Public Health Scholars," *American Journal of Public Health* 107, no. 5 (May 2017): 662–65, https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2017.303691.

was born in the 'Negro' wing of the hospital.[77] His first breath was taken separate from white individuals in the hospital. He grew up in a segregated Black neighborhood right in the center of New Orleans. His life was pervaded by family violence; following World War II, his father lost the high ranking and respect of his position in the Navy. Instead, his father was treated as yet another poor Black man living on a farm. His father turned to alcohol and physical violence against his mother. Eventually, Woodfox and his mother were forced to leave their home, without his two younger siblings.

Woodfox became hyper-aware of his racial identity from a very young age. In his memoir, he describes the first time he ever felt threatened by a white person. Standing next to his mother at a bus stop, he watched two white police officers drive by in a patrol car. He writes, "[My mother] put her hand on my shoulder protectively and moved me behind her".[78] Even at the age of 12, Woodfox could perceive that police officers were not people he could rely on for protection. Instead, he had to be on guard. A few months later, at a Mardi Gras parade in New Orleans, a girl called him the n-word. Woodfox reflects "The pain I felt from that young white girl calling me [n*gger] will be with me forever".[79] Woodfox experienced several instances of being called racial slurs and treated as lesser than. Further, he was aware of greater, more explicit violence taking place. As a young child, he heard stories of the Ku Klux Klan and their capabilities. He wrote, "Like all blacks, I was scared to death of the Klan".[80] Woodfox understood that his identity as a Black boy in the South came with certain fears; while he did not directly experience violence from the KKK themselves, he was genuinely terrified of what the

[77] Woodfox, Albert, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope*.
[78] Woodfox, Albert.
[79] Woodfox, Albert.
[80] Woodfox, Albert.

Klan could do to him and his family. The constant fear that Woodfox experienced, brought on by his racial identity, only reinforces how both the legacy of slavery and the state of race-relations at the time greatly impacted the experience of Black Americans in the South.

For much of his life, Woodfox was in the South and was exposed to the manner of race-relations that existed there. When he briefly escaped from the New Orleans Parish prison, he traveled all the way to New York. It was there that he began to discover how his racial identity could mean something else to him. He describes encountering members of the Black Panther Party in Harlem, writing that he'd "never seen Black people proud and unafraid…they were so confident, especially when they were around police".[81] Up until that point, Woodfox had seen his race in one way—a means of being oppressed by police and others around him. When he found the Black Panther Party, he found a group of people who were empowered by their race and sought to improve their social standing.

In the 1970s, Woodfox was serving time in Tombs, a prison in New York. It was there that he became best acquainted with the Black Panther Party. The members of the Black Panther Party in prison with Woodfox described to him how much America had failed Black people. Woodfox recalls that "They said this country had been treating Blacks horrible and that change was coming. [Woodfox] didn't understand anything about how change could happen. [He] didn't think one person could make a difference".[82] The limited social and political mobility that Woodfox had had as a result of his racial identity in the South was called into question by the words that the Black Panther Party members were telling him. The Panthers gave Woodfox a book called *A Different Drummer,* by William Melvin Kelley. The book told the story of a boy

[81] Woodfox, Albert.
[82] Woodfox, Albert.

born into slavery, a boy who "wants a life that is not dictated by white people".[83] Throughout his life, Woodfox had been forced to endure a system of racial oppression in which white people were always on top. *A Different Drummer* resonated with him because it allowed him to envision a life where his racial identity did not result in continued violence and oppression. The Panthers drew Woodfox's attention to the idea of institutionalized racism: "the foundation for all-white police departments, all-white juries, all-white banks, all-white universities, and other all-white institutions in America".[84] Meeting the Panthers prompted Woodfox to re-examine his own life and the ways in which racism had impacted him.

For Woodfox, racism was the norm. He writes, "The Voting Rights Act wasn't passed until I was 17. Although Blacks were allowed to vote before that, we were usually intimidated…Without knowing Black history, we knew nothing about ourselves…I thought of my mom, living under the dehumanizing Jim Crow laws in a world of white supremacy that didn't care about her. All the textbooks in a Black child's classroom in the South were already used—passed down by white schools under Jim Crow laws. Out of date and worn out, many of them had cruel and racist remarks about Black people written in the margins".[85] For the majority of Woodfox's life up until that point, he had not recognized the systematic oppression of his people as something that could impact him. As a result of the trauma of his people, Woodfox had repressed any intimation that his race might result in differential consequences.

Throughout his time in Angola, Woodfox would continue to question the implications of his race. After an altercation with a guard once, Woodfox was placed in a three-by-six-foot cell. While he spent time there, he reflected, "Sometimes I felt cheated, knowing that being born

[83] Woodfox, Albert.
[84] Woodfox, Albert.
[85] Woodfox, Albert.

black pretty much determined where I'd wind up. I thought it was sad that I had to come to prison to find out there were great African Americans in this country and in this world, and to find role models that I should have had available to me in school".[86] Woodfox's despair further emphasizes the trauma of his racial identity.

The more time that Woodfox spent in Angola, the more candidly he spoke about the ways his racial identity had impacted him. While in solitary, he reflects that "every black man and boy knew what it was like to be picked up by police for no reason. You could be hanging out on the corner with your friends when police on patrol would stop, get out of the car, and tell everybody to get up against the wall. They'd pat everyone down, ask what everyone was doing, and tell everybody to show proof of work".[87] The police were seeking to arrest them on vagrancy charges. Woodfox would only later recognize the injustice of being targeted in this way.

It is not difficult for Woodfox to point to several instances in which his racial identity resulted in differential treatment or an immense miscarriage of justice. It is due to his supreme commitment to achieving change for himself and the rest of his race that Woodfox did not lose hope.

[86] Woodfox, Albert.
[87] Woodfox, Albert.

Chapter Two: Interpersonal Trauma

When Woodfox first entered the criminal justice system, he was met with immense racial violence in the form of both physical abuse and hateful language. He was forced to reckon with law enforcement officials and a court system that he did not believe was designed to protect him. In this chapter, I will examine the extent of physical violence that Woodfox endures, evaluating it against the DSM-5 criteria for PTSD. I will argue that each of the instances of physical abuse that Woodfox endures meet the criteria outlined for a "traumatic event". In this chapter, I will use the definition of interpersonal trauma outlined by Monnica Williams and Isha Metzger in their study entitled, "Assessing racial trauma within a *DSM-5* framework: The UConn Racial/Ethnic Stress & Trauma Survey". The authors distinguish between interpersonal and impersonal trauma, illustrating the concept that interpersonal trauma (typically assaultive in nature) results in higher rates of PTSD.[88] During his time in prison, Woodfox is subject to many assaultive forms of violence, ranging from beatings, strip searches, and severe restriction of mobility. Additionally, he is subject to hateful language, threats, and fear tactics to get him to conform and obey. It's important to note that "brutality goes beyond physical force. It includes emotional and sexual violence as well as verbal assault and psychological intimidation…with the intent to dehumanize and degrade its target".[89] As I will demonstrate in this chapter, the violence that Woodfox endures is exacted in a manner designed to make him to submit. It is a vile, horrific display of force and the ways in which our legal system takes advantage of individuals under its watch.

Section 1: Physical Abuse & Traumatic Events

[88] Monnica T. Williams et al., "Assessing Racial Trauma within a DSM–5 Framework: The UConn Racial/Ethnic Stress & Trauma Survey," *Practice Innovations* 3 (2018): 242–60, https://doi.org/10.1037/pri0000076.
[89] Alang et al., "Police Brutality and Black Health."

In his time at prison, Woodfox is subjected to immense brutality by police officers and prison guards alike. On multiple occasions, Woodfox is part of attempts to solve the ongoing violence taking place. During one such occasion, Woodfox recalls the list of grievances the prisoners had for the administrators: "our most urgent demand…was to end the excessive violence against prisoners, largely directed against black and Puerto Rican prisoners, by officers wielding 'blackjacks, nightsticks, fist and feet,' who beat prisoners to unconsciousness, after which prison doctors colluded with officials to write up fake accident reports".[90] The prisoners were frustrated and exhausted by the endless violence they had to endure. The violence, notably, was exhibited mostly towards Black people and other people of color. Additionally, it was exclusively white prison guards exacting this violence. In response to requests and protests for the violence to stop, the guards and police "sprayed canisters of CS gas onto the tier and chopped through our barricade and sprayed more tear gas on us," according to Woodfox. "The CS gas, meant to be used outside to control riots, was blinding inside, burning our eyes, mouths, nostrils, and lungs and making it almost impossible to breathe. While we were choking and disoriented they forced us back into the cells on the tier, beating us with riot sticks and baseball bats".[91] These violent measures emphasized how much the prisoners were stripped of their humanity. They were not treated as humans; they were treated as animals that needed to be controlled, using whatever means necessary.

The brutality did not end there. Woodfox describes being forced to strip naked along with other prisoners. After this, guards lined the hallway to each prisoner's cell, holding weapons like bats and ax handles. The prisoners were beaten as they ran into the main room. Woodfox was in

[90] Woodfox, Albert, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope*.
[91] Woodfox, Albert.

the last cell on the tier, so he had the farthest to run: "I ran over a floor slippery with blood from busted heads, mouths, and faces. With each running step my only thought was, 'Don't fall, don't fall,' over and over".[92] The scene that Woodfox describes is a battlefield. War veterans diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder often describe their worst memories from the battlefield as those involving mutilated bodies, either dead or injured.[93] The prison guards then forced the men to lie on top of each other in a pile, while they continued to beat them and make crude and racist remarks. Woodfox writes that this was one of the most degrading things he has ever experienced: "Other prisoners were moaning: 'Lord help me. Don't let me die. I can't breathe.' Some of them were screaming. The cries of the other prisoners hurt me the most. I was in physical pain but the greater pain was seeing men break".[94] Woodfox was helpless. Forced to watch his fellow prisoners in agony, while being in pain himself, and not being able to do anything was a new kind of torture.

An area of posttraumatic stress disorder well-documented is its occurrence among war medics. One medic, Sep, described the trauma of witnessing the death and injury of others, saying, "you're in the clinic, and they'd bring all these people that were injured in with open head wounds, shoulders, legs, and guts hanging out. You try to save those people…sometimes you couldn't".[95] For Sep, most of his traumatic memories are contained within the mutilation of bodies he witnessed after brutal violence. Woodfox experiences the same degree of traumatic memories, never able to erase the sight of bloody, degraded, violated bodies from his mind.

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[92] Woodfox, Albert.
[93] Justin Snyder, "'Blood, Guts, and Gore Galore:' Bodies, Moral Pollution, and Combat Trauma," *Symbolic Interaction* 37, no. 4 (2014): 524–40, https://doi.org/10.1002/symb.116.
[94] Woodfox, Albert, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope*.
[95] Snyder, ""Blood, Guts, and Gore Galore."

The physical violence that Woodfox faced was not unique to him. Several prisoners in prisons across the country described being treated violently, especially due to their race. One prisoner, Vaughn Dortch was held in solitary confinement at Pelican Bay prison in California. "After he was placed in the SHU, his mental state deteriorated to the point that he regularly smeared his entire body with his own feces…". To clean him, the guards "cuffed his hands behind his back and pushed him waist-deep into scalding hot water, holding him there. Dortch is African American; one of the guards bathing him said: 'Looks like we're going to have a white boy before this is through.' Dortch ultimately suffered third-degree burns over much of his lower torso and his skin peeled away in chunks".[96] This type of violence was typical behind bars. Guards showed no remorse for their actions and displayed immovable power. It was no surprise that prisoners resented the guards for their violent and racist practices.

On April 17, 1972, a prison guard was murdered at Angola. Woodfox would come to remember this day for the rest of his life. Upon news of the murder spreading through the prison, the prison guards brought each prisoner on Woodfox's tier, where the murder had taken place, in for questioning. The first thing that the deputy sheriff says to Woodfox when he walks in for questioning is, "Woodfox, you motherfucking [n*gger], you killed Brent Miller[97]".[98] The deputy sheriff then pulled out a revolver and continued to scream at Woodfox while holding the gun to his head. The guards in the room then forced Woodfox to strip, dressing him in a white jumpsuit. They handcuffed his wrists and ankles, severely limiting his ability to walk. It should be noted that at this point in time, the prison guards and deputy sheriff had absolutely no reason to believe

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[96] Reiter, *23/7: Pelican Bay Prison and the Rise of Long-Term Solitary Confinement*.
[97] Brent Miller was a white prison guard at Angola. On April 17, 1972, he was murdered while on duty. Woodfox would later be charged with his murder, along with Herman Wallace, Chester Jackson, and Gilbert Montegut, all prisoners believed to be associated with the Black Panther Party. Prior to being accused of this murder, Woodfox had no interactions with Brent Miller.
[98] Woodfox, Albert, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope*.

that Woodfox had committed the murder. The guards then shuffled Woodfox towards the dungeon through a stairwell; in the stairwell, the prison guards assaulted him, beating him while he was restrained. After this brutality, the guards locked Woodfox in the shower cubicle on the tier. Woodfox describes how, for the rest of the day, the guards continued to beat prisoners in the stairwell and lock them into cells: "The blows and the prisoners' pleas and screams in the stairwell echoed through the walls".[99] Having just undergone severe violence, Woodfox was forced to listen to the guards enact the same brutality against his fellow Black prisoners, while he remained helpless, locked alone in the shower. Studies have illustrated that feelings of helplessness, fear, and horror during a traumatic event are more closely associated with the development of posttraumatic stress disorder.[100] Woodfox could do nothing but listen, all while fearing for his own life as well.

This event precedes Woodfox's 44-year stint in solitary confinement, or the Closed Cell Restricted (CCR) cell block. After taking him out of the shower, prison guards escorted Woodfox to CCR, located within the building that houses those on death row. Again, he was forced to endure relentless beating, even being kicked in the eye. The guards placed him in a singular cell. Woodfox describes that his "body was badly bruised from being beaten" but he wanted to walk off the pain. "The cell was nine feet long and six feet wide. [He] could take four or five steps up and back the length of the cell".[101] The prison guards utilized their power over Woodfox to enact violence against him before isolating him in a space smaller than the size of a walk-in closet, as Woodfox would later describe. While Woodfox nursed his injuries in the

[99] Woodfox, Albert.
[100] Chris R. Brewin, Bernice Andrews, and Suzanna Rose, "Fear, Helplessness, and Horror in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Investigating DSM-IV Criterion A2 in Victims of Violent Crime," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 13, no. 3 (2000): 499–509, https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007741526169.
[101] Woodfox, Albert, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope*.

confines of his cell, prison administrators were reestablishing control over the prison through violence. One prisoner reported, of the methods that the prison guards used: "Their shock treatment consists of baseball bats, iron pipes, pick handles, gas and mace sprayed in Brothers' faces, so those who attempt to fight off the blows can't see".[102] The candidness with which the prisoners speak about the violence they had to endure remains shocking. For Black prisoners in Angola, violence was the norm.

The DSM outlines the criteria for experiencing a traumatic event, in order to evaluate whether someone has posttraumatic stress disorder. In this section, "threatened or actual physical assault…threatened or actual sexual violence…torture"[103] are all listed as potential experiences. Each of these happens to Woodfox on multiple occasions, with varying degrees of severity. Just one of these events taken alone could meet the criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder, let alone the repeated instances that Woodfox endures.

While in solitary confinement, the violence does not end. Woodfox was kept locked up for 23 hours a day, 7 days a week. During his one hour of "freedom", Woodfox would be "forced to strip, bend over, and spread [his] buttocks for a 'visual cavity search'".[104] This was a degrading, sexually assaultive practice that would haunt Woodfox for several years to come. In the early years of Woodfox's confinement, CCR was run entirely by white guards. They would taunt Woodfox and the other Black prisoners, and the prisoners often tried to talk back. However, "any act of resistance ended the same way: four or five of them would come into the cell and jump us. It's a hell of a feeling to stand when you know you're going to be beaten…I

[102] Woodfox, Albert.
[103] *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*.
[104] Woodfox, Albert, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope*.

was always scared shitless. Sometimes my knees would shake and almost buckle".[105] The endless number of times that Woodfox endured violence did not change its impact on him. He still found the violence and brutality unbearable. It still took its toll.

In solitary, Woodfox had no power. He was susceptible to whatever violence the prison guards wish to commit. On one occasion, the prison guards attempted to move Woodfox from his cell for no reason. When he resisted moving, the prison captain came to his cell with a CS gas launcher and fired it directly at Woodfox's chest. Quickly, gas began to fill Woodfox's cell. He recalls hearing other prisoners yelling through their cells, "'Put your head in the shitter. Put your head in the shitter.'"[106] Woodfox proceeded to flush his head in the toilet repeatedly. After a little bit, the captain stopped firing the gas launcher, and attempted to remove Woodfox from the cell. Woodfox writes in excruciating detail, "The mucus in my throat was choking me. I couldn't open my eyes. I didn't want to die in my cell".[107] This instance of violence is one of many that Woodfox undergoes. Each taken alone, again, is enough to qualify as a traumatic event. Woodfox experienced severe violence, he feared for his life and legitimately thought that he might die.

Solitary confinement produces its own physical horrors, contained within the six feet by nine feet metal box, also known as the dungeon. Woodfox writes that the dungeon was "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…I got so I could sit in one spot in the cell and feel the physical limitations of it yet know that my mind and emotions were unlimited".[108] Woodfox

[105] Woodfox, Albert.
[106] Woodfox, Albert.
[107] Woodfox, Albert.
[108] Woodfox, Albert.

exhibited an incredible capacity for hope and maintained his spirit even in the face of such great danger. At the same time, Woodfox's fellow friend, and later member of the Angola Three[109], Robert King, was suffering brutality in Camp J. Camp J was a punitive program within Angola that forced prisoners to endure three levels of harsh deprivations, without receiving a disciplinary report. If one were to be written up, they would return to the first level of Camp J and have to start their time over again. King filed a lawsuit against Angola regarding the conditions at Camp J, "citing the cruel and unusual treatment of being locked down 23 hours a day for seven years, how the poor lighting in his Camp J cell damaged his eyesight, and how the lack of exercise contributed to high blood pressure and physical deterioration".[110] Aside from the instances of physical violence stemming from the guards, the conditions of solitary confinement created its own form of physical damage.

Despite being in total isolation, the prisoners are not free from the noises of the prison. Woodfox describes how the sound—of cries, moans, and screams, or of a cell being shaken down, or of a guard yelling taunts—bounced off the concrete walls. The constant noise came with its own mental challenges. Woodfox explains that all of the prisoners in CCR "were dealing with strong, powerful emotions all the time, maybe the strongest that exist: the fear of losing control over yourself, the fear of losing your mind".[111] The prisoners relied on the stability of life within CCR to bring them the illusion of control. Thus, when instances of physical violence occurred, unexpectedly, it exacted a tremendous toll, both physically and mentally. In prison, Woodfox explains, there was always the threat of being attacked, be it by a fellow prisoner or the

[109] The Angola Three consisted of Albert Woodfox, Herman Wallace and Robert King. These three Black men maintained their innocence after each being framed for murder. They would be labeled as militants and be kept in solitary confinement for multiple decades. Through this time, they developed a friendship and found a community of support that rallied around them and fought for their freedom.
[110] Woodfox, Albert, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope*.
[111] Woodfox, Albert.

prison guards. Additionally, shakedowns—searches of the cells—occurred frequently and without warning. Prior to 1978, shakedowns involved strip searches as well: "a shakedown always started with prisoners being forced to strip out of all our clothing and go through the humiliating act of raising genitals, lifting feet, opening mouth, bending over and spreading cheeks for visual inspection".[112] These shakedowns reminded Woodfox of his powerlessness; he could do nothing but submit to such degrading examinations, typically instigated for no reason other than a guard's personal bemusement.

Section 2: Brutality in Language

Racial violence in the form of hateful language was the norm behind Angola's walls. The prisoners of color were treated no better than animals. They were verbally degraded and dehumanized, all as a means of maintaining racial power structures within the prison. Woodfox recalls, guards kept prisoners under constant threat of being sent to the dungeon. Prior to his 44-year stint in solitary, Woodfox had "heard stories about the dungeon, a cellblock not far from the main prison. Prisoners were kept 24 hours a day in a cell…Total isolation. Bread for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. [The prisoners] called it 'the hole.' The lowest-ranking freeman could put you in the dungeon because of the way you looked at him, or if he didn't like your face; if you didn't walk fast enough, or if you walked too fast. Over and over [they] heard, [N*gger], do this or I'll lock your ass up, [n*gger].' Or they called black prisoners 'thing.' What are you looking at, old thing?'…Prisoners could be kept in the dungeon for weeks. No paperwork was required".[113] The verbal assault that comes with being called the n-word and referred to as a "thing" is nothing to scoff at. This kind of language causes a differing kind of trauma; researchers currently conceptualize it "as emotional pain rather than threat to one's life, distinguishing traumatic stress

[112] Woodfox, Albert.
[113] Woodfox, Albert.

from PTSD".[114] The emotional pain that Woodfox experiences each time he hears such derogatory language being used against him severely impacts his own mental health.

Research has demonstrated that racist incidents involving discriminatory language have resulted in "symptoms of anxiety, hyperarousal, physiological responses…sleep disturbances, and problems with recall"[115], all symptoms associated with PTSD. Violence was entrenched into Angola when Woodfox served time there. He writes, "It's painful to remember how violent Angola was in those days. I don't like to go into it".[116] His desire to avoid discussion of such negative memories only further reinforces how painful it was to experience in the first place.

When Woodfox worked in the fields at Angola, he was constantly referred to as an n-word, or "boy". He writes, "I never got used to the verbal disrespect out in the fields".[117] In a study published by Carter et al. titled, "Initial Development of the Race-Based Traumatic Stress Symptom Scale: Assessing the Emotional Impact of Racism", researchers asked 381 adults to describe memorable experiences with racial discrimination. They found high correlation between experiences of racism and depression, intrusion, anger, hypervigilance, physical symptoms, low self-esteem, and avoidance.[118] Being forced to repeatedly experience racist remarks and name-calling in the prison setting was an experience brought on purely due to Woodfox's racial identity, and is thus, heavily linked to racial trauma.

Another common symptom of trauma is acts of aggression following the traumatic event. When Woodfox was initially released from Angola, he was 19 years old, and he began working at a hotel as a porter. He had been working there for almost a month when the hotel hired a

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[114] Carter et al., "Initial Development of the Race-Based Traumatic Stress Symptom Scale."
[115] Carter et al.
[116] Woodfox, Albert, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope*.
[117] Woodfox, Albert.
[118] Carter et al., "Initial Development of the Race-Based Traumatic Stress Symptom Scale."

young white woman as a hostess. She referred to Woodfox as a "boy" when speaking to the guests, saying things like 'this boy will show you to your room'. Woodfox describes asking her to stop, and even going so far as to bring it up with management, but she would not stop. Finally, one day, he lost it: "'I told you I'm not a fucking boy,' I yelled at her. 'I'm a fucking man. You take them to the room your motherfucking self'".[119] The violent way in which Woodfox responded to this woman exposed his own fear and hatred over how he was treated in Angola. His experiences in Angola pervaded his life when he finally got out; he couldn't escape the violence he himself had endured, and he eventually ended up back in Angola again.

When Woodfox is locked in solitary after the murder of Brent Miller, he is isolated from other living beings—guards and prisoners alike. However, he is not isolated from a continual wave of racist and crude remarks: "I started getting notes on my food tray saying things like, 'You're going to die,' 'Eat this food and you eat my dick,' or 'This food will kill you,' all signed by 'the KKK'".[120] These notes prompt Woodfox to search for ground glass in his food, and in some cases, throw it out. Not only did he have to endure violent threats and racist comments invoking supremacist groups, but he also had to be constantly on guard for fear over his safety.

Woodfox was eventually granted a second trial for his role in the murder of Brent Miller. Up until that point, he had been held in prison for almost 25 years, a significant chunk of that in solitary confinement. For his second trial, he was moved from Angola to a jail in Tangipahoa Parish, as he had finished serving time for the armed robbery he was initially placed in Angola for. The day before he was set to be transferred, a prison guard warned him that members of Brent Miller's family were going to be waiting outside the front gate for him; "'it was decided'

[119] Woodfox, Albert, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope*.
[120] Woodfox, Albert.

that the ranking officers in the building would not be there that morning".[121] Woodfox had to spend his last night at Angola fearing that Brent Miller's family would be waiting for him in the morning, seeking retribution for a crime he had not committed. When he finally left in the morning, he writes: "I didn't see any rank except for one lieutenant. I knew then some shit was going down so I mentally prepared myself. No matter what, I would not break. They could kill me, injure me, jump me; I would not beg, scream, or plead for mercy…Members of the Miller family were waiting for me at the front gate dressed in camouflage and wearing sidearms…the Miller brothers began to curse and threaten me, calling me '[n*gger], motherfucker,' telling me, 'You'll be back' and 'You're going to die at Angola, [n*gger]' and that they were going to kill me".[122] Despite Woodfox holding on to the thoughts that he would maintain his courage and not succumb to their violent threats, the incident shook him. He genuinely believed he might hear gunfire as he was placed in the car to head to the other prison; he genuinely believed he would die. Not only did this incident attack Woodfox on the basis of his racial identity, but it also reminded him of the lack of power he had. The prison administration did nothing to protect Woodfox from the obvious intimidation and threats that white community members levied against him.

Section 3: The Traumatic Response

The repeated instances of both physical and verbal abuse throughout his time in Angola manifested in significant psychological and physical reactions for Woodfox. The prisoners lived in constant fear of being placed in the dungeon: "The dungeon could destroy every fragment of a man's dignity and self-respect. The harsh conditions were so hurtful that strong men would cry.

[121] Woodfox, Albert.
[122] Woodfox, Albert.

They broke".[123] Woodfox recalls being acutely aware of the fact that prison administrators and wardens knew exactly what was occurring within the dungeon and how the freemen and inmate guards abused their power. He also recalls that they did nothing to change things. Woodfox lived under constant threat of violence during his first stint at Angola. He "was constantly seeing acts of violence, constantly seeing guys being raped, and [he] lived with the knowledge that that could be [him] at some point in time".[124] The constant watchfulness that he experienced is quite similar to the hypervigilance experienced by war veterans or sexual assault survivors.

Throughout his memoir, Woodfox constantly describes the ways in which prison sought to change him, to break him. He wrote the following about the experience of being at Angola:

> "In prison, you are part of a human herd. In the human herd, survival of the fittest is all there is. You become instinctive, not intellectual. Therein lies the secret to the master's control. One minute you're being treated like a baby, being handed a spoon to eat with or being told where to stand. The next, with utter indifference, you're being counted several times a day—you have no choice, you have no privacy. The next moment you're threated, pushed, tested. You develop a sixth sense as a means of survival, instincts to help you size up what's going on around you at all times and help you make all the internal adjustments necessary to respond when it will save your life".[125]

The adaptive nature that Woodfox describes is typically a response associated with trauma. Individuals will develop a hyperarousal in any situations they perceive to be dangerous. While Woodfox conceptualizes it as a "sixth sense", psychologists might consider it to be clinically and diagnostically significant. The American Psychological Association currently defines hyperarousal as "one of the three sets of criteria used to diagnose posttraumatic stress

[123] Woodfox, Albert.
[124] Woodfox, Albert.
[125] Woodfox, Albert.

disorder…Symptoms of hyperarousal include exaggerated startle response, disturbed sleep, difficulty in concentrating or remembering, and excessive vigilance".[126]

One month into being in solitary confinement for Brent Miller's murder, Woodfox experienced the first of many episodes of claustrophobia. Of his first episode, he writes, "the walls of my cell started to move toward me at the same time. My clothes tightened around my body. I took off my shirt and pants but still felt like I was being squeezed, strangled. The ceiling was pressing down on me. It was hard to breathe, hard to think, hard to see. I took a few steps, trying not to fall. At the end of my cell I turned and walked back to the cell door. I turned and continued, pacing back and forth for several minutes, maybe an hour. Eventually I was so tired I lay on the bunk and fell asleep".[127] Woodfox had to endure several of these episodes by himself, with no avenue to treat them or even understand what was happening to him.

The experience of solitary confinement severely impacts those who survive it. Solitary confinement disrupts one's sense of the world "due to a foreboding sense of absence: no noise, dimmed lights, no people; an alien world where one is so out of place…a space where normal interaction is not possible".[128] When undergoing these claustrophobic attacks, Woodfox was stripped of the support systems typically afforded to humans. He was stripped of the basic emotional care that humans deserve. Woodfox's claustrophobia was not unique to him. Victor Pate, another prisoner describes the impacts after leaving solitary confinement: 'I have to have space; I can't do small spaces at all. Put me in a small space and I flip out…I'm not going to stay in one spot. I cannot sit still. I cannot stand still. I cannot be in one space".[129] Solitary

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[126] "APA Dictionary of Psychology,", https://dictionary.apa.org/.
[127] Woodfox, Albert, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope*.
[128] David Polizzi, "From the Other Side of the Door: The Lived Experience of Solitary Confinement," in *Solitary Confinement*, 1st ed., Lived Experiences and Ethical Implications (Bristol University Press, 2017), 67–90, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1t89f9n.9.
[129] Polizzi.

confinement is debilitating. It severely impacts one's ability to engage in society again. It alters all sense of space for the person in solitary.

A few years into Woodfox being in solitary confinement, it was revealed that he could have been having contact visits with his family the entire time, but the prison administrators had knowingly redacted that information ten years earlier. Woodfox was elated at first, he could have one contact visit a month. The contact visits were entirely different than he had experienced before; he no longer sat, restrained, divided from him family by a steel screen. Instead, he was placed in an open room with chairs and tables. It was his first contact visit, unrestrained, in 15 years. He describes: "There was no natural flow at first. I didn't feel comfortable. I had forgotten what it felt like to be physically close to people. I was used to talking with the partition between us…When my mom put her hand on my leg it brought back a flood of memories. I became a kid again. I had to fight off crying. When they were getting ready to leave I had an intense wave of longing that went through me, a desire to leave with them".[130] Solitary confinement completely destroyed Woodfox's ability to emotionally interact with those around him. It caused him to relearn how to form relationships in solitary confinement; his friendships with Herman Wallace and Robert King were akin to brotherhood, yet they never met face to face. Solitary confinement destroys one's sense of reality and or normal life. Social relationships are completely redefined. Familial relationships are left never whole again.

The prison system separates prisoners from their external social structures in a brutal way. The limitations on frequency of visits severely impacted Woodfox throughout his time in Angola. Additionally, he writes, "One of the cruelties of being in prison is that you are always

[130] Woodfox, Albert, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope*.

the last to know what's going on in your own family".[131] Here, Woodfox speaks of the day he discovered his mother had died—from Herman Wallace, who had heard about it from his sister earlier. Woodfox was denied being able to attend his mother's funeral, because prisoners in solitary confinement were not allowed this right. That day, Woodfox describes his worst experience of claustrophobia. He describes the ceiling feeling mere inches from his face. He writes, "The grief hit me hard. I was also enraged. I wanted to hurt somebody. My emotions were all over the place. I wasn't accustomed to feeling out of control, so I didn't go out of the cell on my hour that day".[132] Solitary confinement had the ability to break him; it skewed his emotions and emphasized his lack of control over his situation and his surroundings.

Despite Woodfox's incredible resilience, solitary confinement still redefined his ability to emotionally engage with other individuals. Emotional interaction is something that is fundamental to human behavior. As humans, we naturally tend towards social behavior; this is, in part, why solitary confinement is so incredibly cruel. It strips individuals of their right to interact with others. Forced to live in isolation, individuals become hopeless. Throughout his memoir, Woodfox describes how traumatic CCR was for him. In CCR, they were not allowed any possessions—no TV, no radio, no books (aside from legal material). "Most of the men in the dungeon were mentally ill; some had already been gassed and beaten before being moved to the dungeon. They screamed or banged on their walls for hours, trying to handle the pressure however they could. I had to turn off my emotions".[133] In response to the trauma he was both experiencing and witnessing, Woodfox had to dissociate from what was happening around him. If he were to let himself experience the full range of emotions in response, he would not be able

[131] Woodfox, Albert.
[132] Woodfox, Albert.
[133] Woodfox, Albert.

to maintain his sanity. The prisoners in the dungeon believed that the dungeon was designed to take in prisoners and return patients. The level of deprivation in the dungeon was unparalleled; they were allowed out of their cells for 15 minutes a day, which was also their time to shower. If they acted out during their time in the dungeon, they would be placed in four-point restraints[134] on the bed. Prisoners were constantly "exposed to harassment, mind games, provocation, beatings".[135] Years of being kept in an environment like this completely damaged an individual's brain. This treatment was internalized by prisoners, leaving them constantly on guard and afraid for their lives.

As Woodfox's case picked up momentum in the early 2000s, he was forced to re-live much of his time in Angola and in solitary confinement more specifically. Woodfox had to meet with a psychologist to explain the impacts of solitary confinement on himself: "Talking about our mental state and emotions was not easy for any of us…I wasn't used to sharing my deepest feelings with anyone. But I knew the barbaric practice of solitary confinement had to stop". Woodfox went on to tell the psychologist, "'The only way to survive the cell is to adjust to the painfulness of it…When you leave, you go back to your life,' I said, 'I go back to my six-by-nine-foot cell and have just minutes to erect all these layers, put all these defenses back.' Every time I had a visit I had to break down the layers that I used to protect my sanity and my physical safety on the tier. When I went back to my cell, I had to put all those layers back. I had to shut my emotional system down. I buried my emotions, so that things that would normally touch me or move me didn't touch me or move me. And I only had approximately five to ten minutes between the visiting room and the cell to do it. 'It is the most painful, agonizing thing I could

[134] Four-point restraints resulted in prisoners being handcuffed to a bed at their ankles and wrists, for any length of time. Often, this forced prisoners to lie in their own urine and feces for hours at a time. They could speak to no one.
[135] Woodfox, Albert, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope*.

imagine,' I said. 'But I have to do it in order to survive'".[136] Woodfox employs such defense mechanisms in order to prevent himself from breaking in the way that solitary confinement can break an individual. As mentioned earlier, the DSM-5 outlines that, "The clinical presentation of PTSD varies. In some individuals, fear-based reexperiencing, emotional, and behavioral symptoms may predominate. In others, anhedonic or dysphoric mood states and negative cognitions may be most distressing. In some individuals, arousal and reactive-externalizing symptoms are prominent, while in others, dissociate symptoms predominate. Finally, some individuals exhibit combinations of these symptom patterns".[137] The layers that Woodfox constructs to protect himself most closely mimic that of dissociative symptoms, but emotional and behavioral symptoms clearly also persist for Woodfox. PTSD, as the DSM-5 notes, does not present the exact same among each individual. Rather, it can include some of these symptoms, for a ranging period of time. Woodfox also experienced anhedonic mood states. When he lost an appeal on his case, he describes how depressed he was. He writes, "I fell back on self-discipline to fight depression. I kept up with my routine. I went on the yard when I was allowed, even though the thrill of being there was gone for me. I got no pleasure from that yard anymore…Herman wrote to me, asking how I was. I wrote back, 'This one hurts but I'll be all right. It's just taking a li'l' longer to catch my breath on this one'".[138]

From Woodfox's description of solitary confinement, the psychologist concluded that feelings of sadness and loss were most prevalent, as well as a "desperate need to not feel those feelings, for fear of being overwhelmed by them".[139] Not only did Woodfox hold an immense

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[136] Woodfox, Albert.
[137] *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*.
[138] Woodfox, Albert, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope*.
[139] Woodfox, Albert.

desire to escape the physical confines of his six-by-nine-foot cell, but he also sought an escape from the torment of emotions that he was forced to experience. To not feel would be to allow himself a moment's rest in such a brutal environment. Woodfox went on to explain to multiple psychologists, "The fear that I might start screaming and never stop was always with me. I don't say that lightly. I described my claustrophobic attacks and my problems with sleeping—the fact that I couldn't sleep more than a few hours at a time. I told [the psychologist] I talked to myself all the time, that I had debates aloud with myself because there was nobody else to talk to".[140] Woodfox was constantly surrounded by individuals driven mad by what solitary confinement had done to them. He would fall asleep to sounds of screaming and moans and meet prisoners who contemplated killing themselves (and attempted to). Not only did he feel immense sorrow and pain for these individuals, but he feared becoming like them.

At several points during his time in solitary, Woodfox wavered in his commitment to hope. There were many times when the pain was too much to bear. Of one such day he writes, "If I'd allowed myself to feel an emotional connection to my reality in that moment I would have gone insane. But I didn't feel the highs and lows that people in society feel anymore. I lived in the middle of every emotion".[141] Woodfox's reality in solitary confinement was incredibly hard to endure. The only way he could get around it was to not think about it. The fact that he could maintain his composure and sanity through over four decades of solitary confinement is shocking.

On February 19, 2016, Woodfox stood before the courts and took a plea of 'nolo contendere', meaning that he would maintain his innocence in the murder of Brent Miller, but his conviction would remain. He was advised by his lawyers to take this plea but doing so took a

[140] Woodfox, Albert.
[141] Woodfox, Albert.

severe mental toll on him. It had taken him over 18 years to get a new trial and justice was still not promised. Now, he had a chance at freedom, so he took it. However, he notes, "By pleading nolo contendere I wouldn't be innocent in the eyes of the law. But I knew I was innocent. The struggle inside me didn't go away. There isn't a day that goes by that I don't think about breaking my word to take that plea".[142] After being kept in solitary confinement for almost 44 years, Albert Woodfox walked free.

He would, ultimately, never be free from what prolonged solitary confinement had done to him. On his first night out of prison, Woodfox fell asleep upright in a chair next to the window. Over the next few years, he would struggle through reentering society. He writes, "to be in my physical body in the physical world again was like being newly born. I had to learn to use my hands in new ways—for seat belts, for cell phones, to close doors behind me, to push buttons in an elevator, to drive. I had to relearn how to walk down stairs, how to walk without leg irons, how to sit without being shackled. It took about a year for my body to relax from the positions I had gotten used to holding while being restrained…Gradually, over two years, I let go of the grip I held against feeling pleasure, and of the unconscious fear that I would lose everything I loved".[143] The memories of solitary confinement continued to haunt Woodfox until his last breathing days.

Woodfox was not alone in the breadth of symptoms he experienced both during and after his time in prison. In a study published by Marieke Liem and Maarten Kunst, titled "Is there a recognizable post-incarceration syndrome among released 'lifers'?", several former inmates reported "recurrent distressing dreams; hyper arousal (sleep disturbances), persistent avoidance

[142] Woodfox, Albert.
[143] Woodfox, Albert.

of stimuli and emotional numbing".[144] These recurrent dreams had to do with what had been experienced in prison. Emotional numbing was a symptom displayed by practically all the prisoners interviewed. Researchers described emotional numbing as a 'prison mask' that provided protection in prison but was maladaptive post-release. One former prisoner noted, "'It's just, you, in prison, you learn not to show your emotions. You don't wanna be weak, you know, you need to be strong, you need to continue to be strong, and always strong'".[145] Most prisoners find themselves permanently altered in some way by their time in prison. They are unable to shake their coping mechanisms and find it difficult to engage in society upon release. Unfortunately, there is still no avenue for those released from prison to receive mental health care and have their experiences recognized as legitimately traumatic.

[144] Marieke Liem and Maarten Kunst, "Is There a Recognizable Post-Incarceration Syndrome among Released 'Lifers'?," *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, Special Issue on Prisons and Mental Health, 36, no. 3 (May 1, 2013): 333–37, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlp.2013.04.012.
[145] Liem and Kunst.

Chapter Three: Structural & Institutional Trauma

Structural and institutional trauma refer to the "emotional and psychological damage from inequity enforced through public policies, institutional practices, cultural images and behaviors which are built into the structure of the culture, and which reinforce social inequity".[146] As I will demonstrate throughout this chapter, Woodfox's experience at both Angola and in the court system outside of it reveal how entrenched racial violence is in every aspect of society. Understanding how structural violence operates is essential to understanding the breadth of trauma that Woodfox was forced to endure. Structural trauma is a manifestation of racial trauma; it relates closely to how institutions have been built and function, largely as a result of historical oppression and foundations of discrimination. Structural and institutional factors allow for the continued perpetuation of racial trauma. Regarding the Louisiana State Penitentiary, the composition of the prison sanctions the relentless racism and discrimination that takes place behind its bars.

In 1870, the lease of the Louisiana State Penitentiary property was given to a former member of the Confederacy—Major Samuel L. James.[147] James ignored every expectation of transparency and subleased Black prisoners to landowners. This was seen as yet another way to replace slavery—Louisiana landowners no longer needed to worry about who would maintain their crops. Inmates at the Angola were there.

Racial divisions at the Louisiana State Penitentiary were present from its conception. Black prisoners were leased to wealthy landowners, while white prisoners were tasked with clerk and craftmanship work, reflecting their perceived superiority. Black prisoners were additionally forced to maintain the prison grounds and complete factory work such as the manufacturing of

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[146] "THEN Center | Trauma," https://thencenter.org/Glossary-Trauma/Historical-Structural-Trauma.
[147] "History," The Louisiana Prison Museum & Cultural Center, https://www.angolamuseum.org/history-of-angola.

clothes and shoes.[148] In 1898, a change largely brought about by the Prison Reform Association[149] took place. Convict leasing was banned. Following this change, in 1901, the State of Louisiana purchased the property known as Angola and began a new system of imprisonment. Angola quickly developed a legacy as "America's bloodiest prison" due to the violence and racial tension that occurred behind its walls. Children in Louisiana grew up singing songs about being sent to Angola. According to Duncan, he grew up singing "*Angola, when I was 1, 1, 1, 1, they booked me for shooting that gun, gun, gun, gun, way down yonder on that farm picking that cotton all day long…Angola, when I was 2, 2, 2, 2, they booked me for sniffing that glue, glue, glue, glue…when I was 3, they booked me for shooting that tree*".[150] By 1917, the State had implemented a new system that would just further enforce racial divisions. Under a new convict guard system, those considered to be on good behavior, called "trusty guards", were treated as officers of the penitentiary.[151] It should be no surprise that the grounds for good behavior quickly transpired into being white. Many of the changes implemented in the Louisiana State Penitentiary were brought about largely out of a desire to reduce expenses. By having trusty guards, the State avoided the expense of paying for officers. As Calvin Duncan, a man who spent 28.5 years wrongfully convicted in Angola, reflects, "'when [he] first arrived, he was taken aback by the sight around him in the field—endless prisoners, mostly Black men, forced to work the same land slaves had worked 120 years before, while white men with guns looked on from atop horses. 'Doesn't that sound like slavery to you?' he asked. When people say this is modern

[148] "History."
[149] The Prison Reform Association was an organization launched largely in response to the harsh conditions in Angola under James' control. This organization was formed in New Orleans and was a prominent civic group.
[150] "How a Wrongly Incarcerated Person Became the 'Most Brilliant Legal Mind' in 'America's Bloodiest Prison,'" Innocence Project, https://innocenceproject.org/calvin-duncan-angola-wrongful-conviction-jailhouse-lawyer/.
[151] "History."

day slavery—this ain't no modern day slavery. This shit *is* slavery. It's no different. It's identical'".[152]

Section 1: Structural Violence at Angola

"It was always called Angola, after the African country where the plantation's original slaves were born. It was fitting as far as I was concerned: the legacy of slavery was everywhere. It was in the ground under our feet and in the air we breathed, and wherever we looked".[153] Racism was embedded into the structure of Angola itself. Throughout his time at Angola, Woodfox recounts several times in which his race resulted in differential treatment. Woodfox describes the set-up of Angola as made up of exclusively white people in high-ranking positions. In the 1960s, he recalls: "The security guards and all of the ranking officers at Angola were white, and we called them 'freemen.' Freemen came from generations of white families born and raised in Angola prison".[154] Angola functioned as a family business. The individuals there had been there for years; their fathers and grandfathers and great-grandfathers had worked as guards, passing on legacies of white supremacist ideals and behaviors.

The administration at Angola did not ever delve deeper into the structural violence occurring behind its walls. As Woodfox describes, the administration *wanted* the violence to take place. It was their way of ensuring they could control the prisoners. They would turn the other way at the first sign of sexual violence, knowingly allowing prisoners to be raped in order to "break them".[155] The ultimate power that the freemen and inmate guards exhibited was unchecked: "there was no oversight. It was as if the cruelty of Angola's history, coming out of

[152] "How a Wrongly Incarcerated Person Became the 'Most Brilliant Legal Mind' in 'America's Bloodiest Prison.'"
[153] Woodfox, Albert, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope*.
[154] Woodfox, Albert.
[155] Woodfox, Albert.

slavery and convict leasing, leaked into our present world. Angola was run like an antebellum slave plantation".[156] The history of the Deep South, and Angola specifically, was inescapable in the prison experience. Everywhere he turned, Woodfox saw racial brutality and tension. In the 1960s, Angola was not a place one could find rehabilitation— "it was lawless and violent, with inmates subject to arduous working and living conditions that were characterized as 'nothing short of barbarous'".[157]

While violence took place between the inmates, the system in place was causing inmates to harm themselves to escape it. At Angola, Black prisoners were assigned the task of maintaining the agriculture crops on its fields. Prisoners were forced to cut sugarcane without proper gloves or footwear. "Cutting cane was so brutal that prisoners would pay somebody to break their hands, legs, or ankles, or they would cut themselves during cane season, to get out of doing it".[158] If the prisoners did not maintain the speed set out by the freemen overseeing them, they could be written up for a work offense and taken to the dungeon.

In his attempts to create change and achieve better conditions for and treatment of prisoners, Woodfox spoke to white prisoners. He told them, "'We are all victims of the same corruption, the same brutality, the same beatings, the same sexual slavery that is allowed by the administration. We all experience the same degrading inhumane conditions in the dungeon. The same lack of medical care. All of us…white and black prisoners, suffer for the same reasons'".[159] Woodfox recognized that the institutional violence taking place within Angola impacted Black and white prisoners alike. While Black prisoners were subject to more racial violence and poorer

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[156] Woodfox, Albert.
[157] Liam Kennedy, "'Longtermer Blues': Penal Politics, Reform, and Carceral Experiences at Angola," *Punishment & Society* 15, no. 3 (July 1, 2013): 304–22, https://doi.org/10.1177/1462474513490049.
[158] Woodfox, Albert, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope*.
[159] Woodfox, Albert.

conditions, white prisoners were also deprived of basic rights and forced to participate in a system in which everyone had to look out for themselves. As Kenneth Woodburn, a white man convicted of second-degree murder in 1992 explains, the system at Angola still perpetuates racism. He told interviewers as part of *The Visiting Room Project,* "I would have to say that racism is still strongly involved…When I first got here, I mean it was like they were mad that I was here. You know, 'you look like a good, young, white kid from a good family. What are you doing here?' White free folks hate them as black inmates, so they take it out on us, in a sense. And I've been proved that because in 1998 I was crowded by forty black people…simply because I was white, because of what a white Captain was doing to a black inmate".[160] White prisoners felt the weight of the racial hierarchy at Angola. The actions of guards towards Black inmates impacted the relations between Black and white inmates. The constant division of labor and segregation in all areas also resulted in further tension.

The prisoners were also victims of an everchanging system of administrative dispute, rife with familial conflict and legacies of ownership. The head of security, a man named Hayden Dees, came from a legacy of families involved with Angola. He had expected to be named warden, until a Tennessee man named C. Murray Henderson was hired. The federal government began looking into Angola in the 1970s, resulting in Henderson pressuring Dees to make changes in the way that Angola was run. Henderson hoped to get rid of inmate guards, integrate the prison, and create standards for disciplinary action; unfortunately for him, "Dees was the most powerful person at Angola at that time, running the prison in every way except on paper, and he wanted to run things like a plantation, the way they'd always been run".[161] Prisoners were

[160] "Kenneth Woodburn," The Visiting Room Project, https://www.visitingroomproject.org.
[161] Woodfox, Albert, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope*.

left caught in an administrative feud, with no mobility or power to secure their own safety. Henderson and Dees were, for all their disagreements, on the same page about the treatment of Black prisoners. There was no question that they believed "no black person had a right to speak up against the brutality and poor conditions at Angola".[162] Even though the white prisoners were victims of the same system, Black prisoners were still at the bottom of the hierarchy.

Woodfox recalls that the conditions at Angola were so bad that "there were a thousand reasons a prisoner would be pushed to the brink and erupt in rage, revenge, and violence against a freeman at Angola…Men were forced to bow their heads and endure constant disrespect, name-calling, threats, and physical violence from prison officials and security guards. You can only kick a dog so many times before he turns around and bites".[163] The system at Angola actively perpetuated harm against the prisoners in a manner that left the prisoners powerless. Angola was an institution that prided itself on its ability to subject Black prisoners to immense brutality, reminiscent of the way Black people were forced in subservience during slavery. The legacy lived on.

During Woodfox's multiple trials through his time at Angola, there were several prisoners who testified against him as well as on his behalf. Upon later investigation, it was discovered that the prisoners who testified against him were moved to better housing, while those who testified on his behalf were moved into more restrictive housing. This was a clear display of intimidation tactics; prison administrators wanted to display to the prison population what would happen if they tried to go against them. There was no reason for the housing changes—no disciplinary reports, no evidence against them.

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[162] Woodfox, Albert.
[163] Woodfox, Albert.

The treatment in Angola did not just extend to witnesses. Anytime there was legal movement by Woodfox, Wallace, or King, the three of them were subjected to increased shakedowns, beatings, gassings, and time in the more restrictive dungeon. Woodfox eventually filed a lawsuit on the cruelty of being kept in solitary confinement for the better part of 35 years. When a judge ruled that the lawsuit could move forward, Woodfox describes "retaliatory harassment". He writes, "Herman [Wallace] and I both knew he was being targeted because of our lawsuit. Prison officials were experts at using the disciplinary court at Camp J to torture and abuse prisoners. They'd build a case against a prisoner, write him up, take him to disciplinary court, sentence him to more time—and the cycle continues".[164] Despite never having smuggled contraband or makeshift weapons into their cells, both Woodfox and Wallace were written up several times for having a "shim" or a handmade handcuff key. Both knew the punishment for having contraband. Both were sure to never take the risk. Yet, prison officials seemingly "found" such contraband in their cell several times, conveniently, right when their lawsuit was picking up steam.

Section 2: Institutional Violence Beyond Angola

Throughout his life, Woodfox had multiple interactions with the legal system, be it through the courts, parish prison, police officers, or other. On two separate occasions, he was charged with rape, despite maintaining that he never raped anyone in his life. The second time he was charged with rape, "it was a case of the police 'cleaning the books.'" When he was arrested, he was initially charged with armed robbery, but the police charged him with "every unsolved robbery, theft, and rape charge they had…Everybody knew about it…The DA's office didn't mind; they could use the additional charges to intimidate guys and pressure them to take plea

[164] Woodfox, Albert.

deals instead of going to trial. Innocent men took plea deals all the time and went to prison versus lying around in the parish jail for two or more years waiting for a trial".[165] Woodfox held an understanding that from top to bottom, no one in the criminal justice system sought to protect him. He recognized a deep flaw within a broken system and fell victim to the people willingly and knowingly participating in it. When Woodfox was charged with multiple crimes, he was held in a questioning room for multiple hours with several detectives. They beat him and tied a plastic bag over his head so that no air could get in. He writes, "When I was about to pass out they took the bag off. After doing this over and over they gathered around me and picked me up in the air and beat me around my body and in between my legs".[166] The detectives had no reason or evidence to hold him; they took the opportunity to physically abuse him in hopes that he would admit to crimes he had not committed.

After being moved to the parish prison, Woodfox discovered he had been charged with multiple crimes. Rather than pleading guilty—meaning he would serve 7.5 years in Angola—he chose to go to trial. He met with his appointed attorney only one time and was found guilty of armed robbery. He writes, "I knew when I was sentenced I'd be thrown away".[167] The abuse he endured before being charged with the crime displayed the lack of power that Woodfox held. In the context of the legal system, Woodfox came out on the bottom every time. Not only did the police officers and detectives involved brutally abuse their position of power, but the court system also failed Woodfox. After his trial, he was labeled a "habitual felon" meaning that his sentence could be increased, all the way up to life in prison, even for a nonviolent crime.[168] Woodfox was allowed no justice in a system that had already treated him so violently. At his

[165] Woodfox, Albert.
[166] Woodfox, Albert.
[167] Woodfox, Albert.
[168] Woodfox, Albert.

trial, the judge called Woodfox an animal, and other derogatory names, and sentenced him to 50 years in prison. Again, the use of language pervaded Woodfox's emotional health. Being spoken to in this way, by an arbiter of the law, only further confirmed for Woodfox that the system would fail him over and over again.

The largest example of this is when Woodfox was tried and convicted of Brent Miller's murder. After having been locked in solitary confinement for no reason, Woodfox was brought before the warden. Woodfox recalls that the warden did not ask him where he was the morning Brent Miller was killed, nor did he ask what he was doing or who he was with. Instead, "He asked me why I killed Brent Miller. I told him I didn't kill Brent Miller. He asked me why I hated white people. I told him I didn't hate white people".[169] Only a week later, Woodfox was indicted, along with Herman Wallace, Chester Jackson, and Gilbert Montegut, all Black prisoners. Woodfox, Wallace, Jackson and Montegut were believed to be associated with the Black Panther Party—Angola administration had labeled them 'militants'. There was no evidence that Woodfox was near where Brent Miller was killed. Multiple witnesses came forward attesting to the impossibility of Woodfox committing the crime. Police had no motive, no testimony (aside from pure speculation from witnesses paid off by the prison administration) and held clear racial prejudice against Woodfox and the other Black men implicated in the murder.

During his second trial, in 1998, Woodfox was forced to recognize that nothing within the legal system had changed. His prosecuting attorney, Julie Cullen, used every tactic in the book to hide the truth from jury members. Woodfox describes how she attempted to paint a picture of a racist, hateful man to the jury members—something he was notably not, despite

[169] Woodfox, Albert.

having every reason to be. Woodfox recalls that Cullen "told jurors I killed Brent Miller because I hated white people and that my affiliation with the Black Panther Party proved that I advocated violence against white people. The murder of Brent Miller, she said, was a 'hate crime' a 'racially motivated Black Panther murder'".[170] Cullen reinforced the misguided notions that the Black Panther Party was built on the foundation of a hatred for white people. She used this notion to her advantage to convince the jury of Woodfox's flawed character. She called upon witnesses to testify to skewed versions of events. She had prison guards speak to Woodfox's comments about their racism, failing to include that these comments were made after Woodfox was subjected to gassing, beating, violent language, and strip searches. Cullen purposefully confused the jury, referencing evidence that was ruled inadmissible so that the jury would still factor it into their decision. In 1973 when Woodfox was initially tried, a key piece of evidence was that a bloody fingerprint had been found at the scene of the crime. The fingerprint was deemed "strongly identifiable" but did not match Woodfox. Furthermore, the prison administration never had the fingerprint tested against the prints of other prisoners on the tier.

Of the fingerprint, Cullen told jury members that it was likely not a fingerprint, explaining that it could be a partial palm print and that was why it did not match Woodfox's prints. She displayed immensely poor etiquette in the courtroom, as she did not notify the defense of her partial palm print theory until the day of the trial. Throughout the trial, Woodfox was continually denied an opportunity to display his evidence; he had video recording of prison guards admitting that they paid a prisoner to testify against him, yet the judge did not allow it to be played. After this sham of a trial, Woodfox was found guilty by the jury and sentenced to

[170] Woodfox, Albert.

natural life without the possibility of parole, probation, or suspension of sentence. By all accounts, it seemed that he would die in Angola.

Throughout Woodfox's trial, the State introduced several theories as to how Woodfox could have murdered Brent Miller. All of the witnesses offered conflicting theories—some testified that Woodfox, Wallace, Jackson and Montegut committed the crime together, while others said that they saw only Woodfox in the cell. Hezekiah Brown testified that he watched Woodfox, along with the other three, commit the murder. Brown was later revealed to have been offered a chance at sentence commutation for this testimony. Chester Jackson, in exchange for a lesser sentence, testified that he saw Woodfox stab Miller in the chest first. Brown had sworn that the attack started when Woodfox stabbed Miller in the *back.* Brown testified that the attack had taken place for no longer than 2 minutes, while Jackson stated it was at least 10 minutes. Brown testified that he did not see the other 4 witnesses that the State called upon. Jackson testified the same. However, the State still used the other 4 testimonies as evidence of Woodfox's participation in the murder. Woodfox outlines several other instances throughout the trials of clear prosecutorial misconduct, as well as evidence that blatantly follows no clear logic.

Woodfox felt increasingly frustrated at the lack of justice the legal system could provide. He writes, "I knew from experience the judicial system is not concerned with innocence or justice…An innocent man could be hanged and the court system would rule on what kind of rope was used for the hanging".[171] As Woodfox would continue to note, he felt personally responsible each time one of his appeals failed; his number of supporters had grown dramatically through his time in solitary, and he didn't want them to lose hope. Even in the face of such disappointment

[171] Woodfox, Albert.

and heartbreak in knowing that he would return to solitary confinement each time an appeal failed, he showed immense selflessness, not wanting it to impact his community of support.

In 2015, Woodfox was granted a new trial after several appeals and exhausted attempts. In his previous trials, several questions had been raised about the jury selection process used, as it excluded African Americans from his jury. In his new trial, the courts ruled that Woodfox would have a nonunanimous jury (only 10 jurors needed to agree on a verdict as opposed to the traditional 12 jurors). Of this decision, Woodfox writes: "Louisiana and Oregon are the only two states in America where defendants can be convicted by fewer than 12 jurors, a system created to marginalize the votes of black jurors when courts were first required by law to allow blacks on juries. Since it is easier to get a conviction with a nonunanimous jury, the system was also established in Louisiana to help fill its prisons when it relied on convict labor to replace slave labor during Reconstruction".[172] Unsurprisingly, racist laws and practices built on the historical foundation of slavery would impact Woodfox years later. The legacies of slavery remain entrenched in all areas—prisons, courts, and more.

[172] Woodfox, Albert.

Chapter Four: Multiple Traumas in Solitary Confinement

On April 17, 2012, Woodfox had been in CCR for 40 years. He wrote, "To be honest…I am not sure what damage has been done to me, but I do know that the feeling of pain allows me to know that I am alive. If I dwelled on the pain I have endured and stopped to think about how 40 years locked in a cage 23 hours a day has affected me, it would give insanity the victory it has sought for 40 years".[173] For over 44 years, Woodfox fought the brutality of solitary confinement. He was resilient.

However, as evidenced by Woodfox's experience and the experience of many others behind prison walls, solitary confinement clearly exacts severe harm on those who must endure it. Conceptualizing the impact of solitary confinement is the first step in determining whether there is any hope for rehabilitation in a system with solitary confinement. In current research relating to trauma, researchers "typically do not focus on racism as a factor in the development of PTSD after exposure to an event (e.g. disasters, combat, and violence). However, they have found racial minorities have elevated levels of PTSD not fully explained by the event or other factors".[174] Woodfox's racial identity undeniably results in differential treatment of him by police officers, the court system, and the prison system. His race impacted the way he was treated behind bars in both explicit and implicit ways. Whether it was his labeling as a 'black militant' or the constant racial discrimination in use of the n-word and other slurs, Woodfox had to endure racial trauma. Coupled with the psychological symptoms—the claustrophobia, trouble sleeping, increased anxiety, hypervigilance, and dissociative behavior—solitary confinement creates a new world of harm.

Section 1: Trauma not Defined in the DSM-5

[173] Woodfox, Albert.
[174] Carter et al., "Initial Development of the Race-Based Traumatic Stress Symptom Scale."

The DSM-5 continues to be used as the leading psychological source for many clinicians, as it was published by the American Psychiatric Association and can be used as a diagnostic tool relatively effectively. However, it cannot entirely be considered as a comprehensive guide for evaluating trauma, as evidenced by Woodfox's experience. There are several instances in which what he experiences meets some of the criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder, but there is nowhere to fit the instances of racial violence he faces.

Prior to the 1980s, psychological diagnoses were not viewed as clinical. A diagnosis was not considered to be separate from one's experiences. "Clinicians viewed mental problems as being closely intertwined with people's psychosocial backgrounds and circumstances and therefore impossible to isolate from personal interpretations, identities, socialization, relationships, and life events".[175] Until the publication of the DSM-3 in 1980, mental illness was not viewed as something that could be standardized or characterized for everyone who had them. The publication of the DSM-3 changed this notion entirely. Mental illnesses could suddenly be conceptualized as disorders that contained specific features (symptoms, diagnostic criteria, etc.) rather than individualized experiences. The shift away from experiential based treatment resulted in more clinical usage. The DSM became embedded entirely in the world of psychological study and treatment.

A common critique of the DSM is that it fails to account for social factors, as it was created without those social factors in mind. "The DSM diagnoses usually move from 'powerful psychiatrists' to relatively powerless groups such as women, racial and ethnic minorities, the sexually unconventional, and the impoverished".[176] As Allan Horwitz argues in his book, *DSM:*

[175] Allan V. Horwitz, *DSM: A History of Psychiatry's Bible* (Baltimore, UNITED STATES: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/emory/detail.action?docID=6627981.
[176] Horwitz.

A History of Psychiatry's Bible, the DSM places clinical labels on issues of medical, social, and societal problems. Many in the psychological field believe that the DSM's conception of posttraumatic stress disorder is "Western culture-bound" and does not have cultural applicability in accounting for differences in race and ethnicity.[177] The DSM tends to standardize diagnostic criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder, thus leaving no space for consideration of time, place, and social groupings.

The chief complaint with the DSM's understanding of posttraumatic stress disorder is that it requires an experience of a traumatic event; beyond that, the criteria is rather vague and broad. Criterion A, which describes traumatic event includes "incarceration as a prisoner of war"[178] as a potential experience. How could it be that incarceration during war somehow could traumatize an individual, but incarceration outside of war may not? This merely emphasizes the skewed and perhaps, limited way of understanding trauma. Further, "Another level of critique of the PTSD category involves its dangerous potential for medicalizing human suffering; that is, for reducing the social and moral implications of traumatizing events, such as war or genocide, to a strictly professional, even biological, set of consequences".[179] Human suffering does not always neatly fit into the criteria outlined in the DSM; does this make such suffering any less valid or traumatizing?

As Woodfox's experience reveals, human suffering can take its shape in several different ways. It can be brought on by physical violence, brutality in language and memories of a horrific past and present experience of oppression. Yet, the DSM does not provide an avenue for individuals like Albert Woodfox to be clinically recognized as having suffered trauma. Given

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[177] Devon E. Hinton and Roberto Lewis-Fernández, "The Cross-Cultural Validity of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Implications for DSM-5," *Depression and Anxiety* 28, no. 9 (2011): 783–801, https://doi.org/10.1002/da.20753.
[178] *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*.
[179] Hinton and Lewis-Fernández, "The Cross-Cultural Validity of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder."

that the DSM is a diagnostic tool used so widely by psychologists, it is essential to recognize what it leaves out.

There continues to be a gap in literature regarding the impact of incarceration on the development of trauma. Not only do former prisoners exhibit many overlapping symptoms of PTSD, but they also display "institutionalized personality traits (distrusting others, difficulty engaging in relationships, hampered decision-making), social-sensory disorientation (spatial disorientation, difficulty in social interactions) and social and temporal alienation (the idea of 'not belonging' in social and temporal setting)".[180] The DSM's conception of posttraumatic stress disorder, as well as other anxiety disorders, does not include criteria that accounts for these symptoms.

The support systems offered to former prisoners upon release are increasingly limited. Additionally, "prisoners suffering from mental illness do not have access to care to the same extent as non-imprisoned populations…to the extent that mental health care *is* available and accessible, mental health professionals are often poorly equipped, both in knowledge and skill, to deal with the unique dynamics of the prison culture".[181] Prisoners are left without any resources to mitigate the array of negative symptoms that they face. The lack of clinical recognition of their experience, contained within the lack of acknowledgement by the DSM of incarceration as a stressor, only furthers this problem.

Section 2: A Case for a Biopsychosocial Approach

It is far past time that the prison experience, and solitary confinement, were examined to better realize its effects and how they can be treated. The trauma that Albert Woodfox endured for almost 44 years cannot be viewed solely from the lens of psychological trauma; the current

[180] Liem and Kunst, "Is There a Recognizable Post-Incarceration Syndrome among Released 'Lifers'?"
[181] Liem and Kunst.

conception of posttraumatic stress disorder does not offer Woodfox any relief. It does not provide any acknowledgement of the racial trauma he endured, nor does it legitimatize the physical violence and brutality exacted upon him.

It is for this reason that a biopsychosocial model is best to understand the prison experience. The overlap and inclusion of biological, psychological, and social factors is necessary to understand health impacts. In 1977, George Engel published in a paper in *Science* arguing against the dominant and accepted model of biomedical illness. He wrote that it left "no room within its framework for the social, psychological and behavioural dimensions of illness".[182] Engel believed that it was increasingly essential to factor in social and psychological dimensions of health, as he was under the impression that they played a large role in how an illness might have presented. Under this model, biological factors, such as physical health and genetic vulnerabilities, psychological factors, like coping and social skills, and social factors, like family circumstances and schooling, are all accounted for. Additionally, their overlap— the impacts of family relationships, historical trauma, temperament—is included.

Woodfox's experience in prison can be best understood from a biopsychosocial lens. He endures both psychological and racial traumas, manifested in interpersonal trauma, impersonal trauma, and structural/historical trauma. Each of these traumas are closely related; impersonal trauma based on witnessing racial violence is tied to the historical foundations of oppression that allowed that racial violence to take place. Being the victim of racial violence, both in physical and verbal abuse, results in interpersonal trauma that takes a psychological toll. Solitary confinement and the prison experience overall are harmful due to the way that these types of traumas interact with each other. The psychological trauma that Woodfox endured is

[182] Derick T Wade and Peter W Halligan, "The Biopsychosocial Model of Illness: A Model Whose Time Has Come," *Clinical Rehabilitation* 31, no. 8 (August 1, 2017): 995–1004, https://doi.org/10.1177/0269215517709890.

predominantly racial in nature. Within solitary confinement, it appears that the impersonal, interpersonal, and structural manifestations of psychological and racial traumas come together to create a detrimental experience.

Critics of the biopsychosocial model generally worry that the model seeks to remove the reliance on biomedical understandings of illness; however, the "bio-" part of the term is of equal importance to the "psycho-" and "social" factors. Woodfox's experience cannot be viewed without reliance on all three of these factors. His physical health, psychological health, and the impact of social/environmental factors worked in tandem to create such a harmful 44 years. Without contextual factors of Woodfox's race and treatment in prison, his trauma could not be adequately conceptualized.

The concept of cumulative trauma is usually reserved for the field of physical health; cumulative trauma refers to the incidence of repeated injury—like, for example, having liver surgery then intestinal failure. However, research has indicated that cumulative trauma also exists in the field of psychology. Cumulative trauma refers to the idea that traumas of different types can build upon each other and have significant mental health consequences. Multiple traumas can make an individual more susceptible to the experience of future trauma and impact the severity of that trauma.[183] Furthermore, the collective effects of environmental stress (which can manifest in physical abuse, continued threats, and structural violence) can produce cumulative trauma.[184] The harm of solitary confinement is that it creates a multiplicative effect through the combination of impersonal, interpersonal and structural traumas. Psychological and

[183] R. Jay Turner and Donald A. Lloyd, "Lifetime Traumas and Mental Health: The Significance of Cumulative Adversity," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 36, no. 4 (1995): 360–76, https://doi.org/10.2307/2137325.
[184] Williams et al., "Assessing Racial Trauma within a DSM–5 Framework."

racial trauma work in tandem to result in significant detriment to individuals forced to experience solitary confinement.

Conclusion

When he was freed from prison, Woodfox commented on the state of racism in America. He wrote, "Racism today isn't as blatant as it was 44 years ago, but it is still here, underground, coded. We have to make changes that are deeper, as a society. Without roots, nothing can grow".[185] Despite enduring a lifetime of racism, discrimination, and injustice, Woodfox found a way to move past what he had experienced and hold onto hope. For 44 years, he held onto the idea that justice could prevail and that eventually he would be seen as an innocent man in the eyes of the law. When he left prison, he was not granted his innocence. Instead, he walked away with the scars of 44 years of physical abuse, racial violence, and memories to haunt him. He was given six years outside of a six-by-nine-foot cell before he died of COVID-19.[186]

He spent the six years he had advocating for change behind prison walls. He traveled across America telling his story to anyone who would listen. He sought to expose the ways in which racism functioned behind prison walls and bring light to the fact that even though slavery was over, racial hierarchy and violence still exists. It is my hope that in analyzing his story, one can see how much trauma he had to endure. Conceptualizing solitary confinement as an experience of racial trauma and psychological trauma illustrates how harmful this practice is. Those forced to endure it for a month, let alone 44 years, face lasting impacts. If the prison system is designed to rehabilitate the individuals it takes in, how can it enact such harm?

The racial injustice in America has impacted our institutions significantly. The history of oppression and hierarchy that our society is built upon continues to take its toll on Black communities across America. Racial discrimination and violence are just as rampant today as it

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[185] Woodfox, Albert, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope*.
[186] "Albert Woodfox, Survivor of 42 Years in Solitary Confinement, Dies at 75 - The New York Times,", https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/05/us/albert-woodfox-dead.html.

was during the era of lynching less than 100 years ago. The after-effects of slavery and Jim Crow are entrenched within our systems—most specifically, our prison system. Acknowledging this is essential if there is to be any hope of reform.

Through my exploration of Woodfox's experience, I conclude that solitary confinement is a combination of racial and psychological traumas, both working in unique ways alongside one another to have damaging repercussions. Impersonal, interpersonal, and structural traumas are all debilitating to the psyche; the fusion of all three is incredibly detrimental. Woodfox's racial identity drastically impacts his experience in solitary confinement. It is my hope that through this thesis, readers will begin to question how solitary confinement is administered behind prison walls. Solitary confinement leaves a permanent mark on whoever endures it; if we as a society continue to enable its existence, there is a need for greater recognition of its impacts and treatment for people who eventually leave the prison system.

Consideration of this research in the future has the potential to alter several lives. Understanding the traumas that are involved in solitary confinement may help to alleviate that trauma from being perpetuated. From Woodfox's account alone, it is clear that greater oversight is needed among prison administrative and behind prison walls. We can no longer look the other way as violence is perpetuated continually towards helpless victims. Albert Woodfox may no longer be with us, but the lessons from his story must live on forever.

Today, 80,000 lives hang in the balance. 80,000 people sit in a six-by-nine-foot cell, facing unimaginable torment. I can only hope that this work offers them a chance to be saved from their pain.

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