

The Silent Treatment in Prison

Jane Brox, *The Silent Treatment Solitary Confinement's Unlikely Origins*, The Public Domain Review [dostęp 25 luty 2024 r.], dostępny w Internecie: <https://publicdomainreview.org/essay/silent-treatment/>

I Watch a trailer for *The Shawshank Redemption* at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLI99DIL6b4>

II Warm-up discussion. Talk in pairs or small groups.

Have you ever been to the prison? Yes?

When was it?

Why did you go there?

What did you see there?

Have you ever been to the prison? No?

How do you imagine a typical prison in Poland looks like?

III Match the words with their Polish translation.

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|-------------------------|---|
| 1. incarcerated | a) samotność, odizolowanie |
| 2. solitary confinement | b) okryty złą sławą |
| 3. protective custody | c) chrzest |
| 4. redemption | d) uwięziony, osadzony w więzieniu |
| 5. solitude | e) poniżyć |
| 6. Quakerism | f) areszt prewencyjny |
| 7. notorious | g) odkupienie (win) |
| 8. felons | h) karczer, więzienna izolatka |
| 9. humiliate | i) przestępca |
| 10. baptism | j) kwakryzm (doktryna wyznawana przez protestancką sektę kwakrów) |

IV Read the fragments from the text by Jane Brox *The Silent Treatment Solitary Confinement's Unlikely Origins* and answer the questions below.

On any given day in the United States, of the more than one million men and women incarcerated in jails and prisons, over 120,000 are locked in solitary confinement. None have been sentenced by a court to their isolation. They are serving a punishment within punishment, having been placed in solitary by prison officials for a variety of reasons: violent crime, petty theft, gang involvement, political activism. Some are in protective custody; others have mental health issues and are considered too difficult to control. (...) Confined prisoners don't participate in educational or rehabilitation programs. Other than meals — which are often more meager than those provided to the general prison population — and an hour of exercise a day, little exists to distract them from the heaviness of time, and nothing at all suggests that the historic roots of such punishment can be traced to the concept of redemption.

The idea of the solitary cell as an integral part of the American prison system arose during the Early Republic, the specific vision of Philadelphia physician and Founding Father Benjamin Rush, who advocated for time in solitude and silence — the active, searching silence of Quakerism — as an alternative to the bodily pain, injury, and humiliation of public hangings and whippings. He saw it as a means not only of punishment but of reformation for housebreakers, forgers, highway robbers,

horse thieves, and even murderers, and his vision of justice eventually led to the construction of the world's first penitentiary, Eastern State, designed by architect John Haviland, and raised on the grounds of an old cherry orchard three miles outside of Philadelphia's city limits. (...)

At the time, Philadelphia had already begun to search for alternatives to the public, provocative blood punishments and the notorious chaos of its overcrowded jails. Most notably, city officials were experimenting with having felons undertake public works projects such as building, maintaining, and cleaning the streets. The felons, known as "wheelbarrow men", wore brightly colored or boldly striped uniforms, which were meant both to humiliate them and to help identify them should they escape. (...)

In addition to decrying traditional methods of punishment, Rush offered specific proposals for a penitentiary in which silence would be put toward many ends — ideas that were inextricable from the city's Quaker roots. Silence in Philadelphia held a profound and specific meaning that harked back to its first days as a settlement (...)

Not only did silence have a particular meaning in Pennsylvania, justice did as well. William Penn, in his new colony, was concerned with fostering a humane and fair means of dealing with transgression, a belief born of experience. Still, Penn's laws, though less severe, were based on traditional means of carrying out justice. What Rush proposed was innovative, and in the years following his speech, he more fully articulated specific ideas for the penitentiary.

Prisoner No. 1, Charles Williams, passed through the portal of the still-to-be-completed penitentiary on October 22, 1829. The eighteen-year-old Black farmer was sentenced to two years of solitary and silent confinement for breaking into a house and stealing a silver watch, a gold seal, and a gold key worth, in total, \$25.00 (about \$830.00 in today's money). His entry ritual in the penitentiary's central rotunda was meant to be a kind of baptism. After he had his hair cut, he was issued two handkerchiefs, two pairs of socks, a pair of shoes, woolen trousers, a jacket, and a shirt. His identity as Prisoner No. 1 was sewn into his clothing and hung above the entrance to his cell. He would not be called Charles again for the duration of his stay.

He was meant never to know where in the penitentiary his cell was located — while being ushered to it, Williams was hooded. All he was to comprehend of his physical world was the twelve-by-eight-foot whitewashed cell he inhabited: its stone floor; the bed, which could be folded against the wall for more room, with its sheet, blanket, and straw mattress; some scrubbing and sweeping brushes; a clothes rail; a wash basin; a mirror; a crude flush toilet; a tin cup; a victuals pan; a stool; and a workbench where he was to spend his time making shoes. Light from a small ocular window cut into the ceiling was deemed sufficient for his work and for reading the Bible. The window was known as the Eye of God, although architect John Haviland referred to it as a Dead Eye, which could be darkened by placing a half keg over it should a prisoner need to be disciplined. Charles Williams' individual exercise yard adjoining his cell, and, nearly identical in size to it, was walled in stone. There, for one hour a day, he could look up at a patch of sky.

Williams wouldn't be able to receive or write letters. Although he might exchange occasional words with a guard or inspector, and he'd have regular visits from moral and spiritual instructors, no friends or family would be allowed to visit him. He was not to talk unless instructed to. He was not to make any unnecessary noise. The guards patrolling the hallways wore socks over their boots to muffle their footsteps. A prisoner would never know when a guard was approaching the peephole in his door, and so always had to expect he was being watched. Likewise, the wheels of the meal cart were fashioned of wool, which caused no perceptual sound when rations were delivered. The food was meant to be plentiful and nourishing: coffee or cocoa in the morning, one pound of bread a day, potatoes and meat at noon, a type of corn pudding called "Indian mush" in the evening. Each prisoner was granted a half-gallon of molasses each month, and could ask for salt.

In today's isolation, the food is not only often meager but unappetizing, with few fresh fruits and vegetables, and bread that is often soggy, sometimes moldy. The noise is unceasing. Random cries and howls. Screams. Rattling. Banging. Shouting. Buzzers and alarms. (...) Still, an inmate who has

spent time in twenty-first century isolation would recognize the dimensions of Charles Williams' cell, and its toilet, sink, and narrow bed against the wall. And its lack of privacy. A modern inmate may be continually monitored by video feed.

Eastern State housed its last prisoners in 1971. By then, the city of Philadelphia had long grown around its walls of Schuylkill stone. Today the penitentiary remains in a state of preserved ruin. Visitors can peer into mockups of the cells as they were in Charles Williams' time. They can also descend beneath one of the ranges to view four solitary cells constructed in the 1920s — by then Eastern State had become a fully congregate prison — for the purpose of punishment within punishment. They had been carved out of an underground tunnel. No beds. No workbench. No plumbing. No windows. What electric light there was would have been controlled by the guards. In their ruin those four cells now stand for all that became of Rush's hope for a system to replace the barbarity of the ages.

1. Who was the individual who first proposed the idea of solitary confinement as a means of reformation in the American prison system?

- a) Benjamin Rush b) William Penn c) John Haviland d) Wheelbarrow men

2. What were city officials in Philadelphia experimenting with as alternatives to traditional methods of punishment?

- a) Public hangings b) Overcrowded jails c) Public works projects d) Mental health facilities

3. What specific meaning did silence hold in Philadelphia, particularly in relation to its Quaker roots?

- a) A means of communication b) A form of punishment c) A symbol of humility
d) A form of reformation

4. What was the purpose of the brightly colored or boldly striped uniforms worn by felons involved in public works projects in Philadelphia?

- a) To hide their identity b) To make them more visible c) To distinguish them
d) To make them feel proud

V True or False?

1. Charles Williams was the first prisoner to enter the penitentiary.
2. Charles Williams was given a pair of shoes, a hat, and a coat upon entering the penitentiary.
3. Charles Williams was allowed to know the location of his cell.
4. Charles Williams had a personal exercise yard next to his cell.
5. Charles Williams was allowed to receive and write letters during his stay.
6. The penitentiary housed its last prisoners in 1991.
7. Nowadays visitors can view the solitary cells constructed in the 1920s beneath the penitentiary.

VI Answer the questions:

1. What was the reason for Charles Williams' imprisonment and what were the items he stole?
2. Why were guards instructed to wear socks over their boots while patrolling the hallways?
3. Based on the text, what can be inferred about the author's opinion on the treatment of prisoners in Eastern State Penitentiary?

VII Put the words in the gaps.

a) guards b) solitary confinement c) inmate d) felons e) notorious
f) protective custody g) solitude h) incarcerated i) punishment

1. The criminal was for his involvement in the robbery.
2. After causing trouble, he was placed in for a week.
3. Due to threats from other prisoners, he was put in
4. He enjoys spending time in to clear his mind.
5. The prison is full of dangerous who have committed serious crimes.
 6. The gang leader was feared by both inmates and guards
 7. He received a severe for breaking the prison rules.
 8. The are responsible for ensuring the safety of the inmates.
 9. As an, he had to follow the prison rules and regulations.

VIII Choose 2 questions and discuss them in groups of 3-4.

Be able to present the results of the discussion to the rest of the class.

1. Have you ever thought about the impact of solitary confinement on incarcerated individuals?
2. How do you think being in protective custody affects a person's mental health while in prison?
3. Do you believe that inmates in solitary confinement should have access to educational or rehabilitation programmes?
4. What are some potential drawbacks of using solitary confinement as a form of punishment in prisons?
5. Can you imagine what it would be like to experience solitude and silence for an extended period of time?
6. How do you think guards can ensure the safety and well-being of inmates in solitary confinement?

IX Follow up.

Express your ideas in a written form 100-150 words.

Do you think there are better alternatives to solitary confinement as a method of punishment in correctional facilities?



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