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Never Saw It Coming The Other Side of the Tracks By Perry Redd BC Columnist

I find it strange that white people are amazed when they find out that someone spent four years in solitary confinement. We all know and agree that the criminal justice system is pockmarked with injustice... like unrestrained solitary confinement. That's kind of what Guantanamo Bay looks like. But of course it's okay because that's about national security. Tell me why that's *not* about humanity?

I bring "white people" to this conversation because Shane Bauer was one of three Americans detained in 2009 while hiking in Iraq's Kurdish region near the Iranian border. He and Joshua Fattal were held for 26 months, while Sarah Shourd - now Bauer's wife - was held for 13 months. The story Bauer is telling is about his four months in solitary confinement. Bauer's "Solitary in Iran Nearly Broke Me" is the most recent cover story for *Mother Jones*.

What is so utterly insulting to me is that Bauer is getting play for his four months in confinement. I am the first to say that solitary confinement is no one's friend, but Black men all over America sit in solitary confinement or the SHU - for periods of six months while detectives just investigate! That doesn't even begin to count toward the months - years - in solitary confinement, when they are found guilty *after* that investigation.

While I was awaiting trial during my five year stint in the federal system, I sat in solitary confinement for a combined time of over two years. Does anyone really want to hear my story? The advantage of being white in America seems to be a white person's province in telling

the story. I find it shameful that the inhumane practice of SHUs is only given validity when a white man tells the story. You know that old saying: The white man's ice is colder.

Now, Bauer's new book, due for publication in 2014, talks about the injustice exacted upon Mumia Abu-Jamal, who spent decades in solitary confinement. Americans were made aware, for years, of the injustices against Abu-Jamal - even in the face of obviously insufficient and tainted evidence used to justify his conviction. As Americans, we should find it strange that all of a sudden, Bauer is struck by the inhumanity of solitary confinement. So much so that he's now compelled to publicly speak out against it.

Consider the cases of Herman Wallace and Albert Woodfox; both of them have been held in solitary confinement in Louisiana. The state says they were guilty of murdering a guard at Angola Prison, but Wallace, Woodfox and their network of supporters say they were framed for their political activism as Black Panthers. Woodfox and Wallace founded the Angola chapter of the Black Panther Party in 1971. These men have been in solitary confinement since April 17, 1972! Yes, you heard me right...since 1972, for **40 years** of their lives!

When I heard about Shane Bauer's publicity tour and his article, I saw injustice coming. Did you? If you didn't, why didn't you? So tell me what makes Shane Bauer's case more worthy of front-page attention? Is it the fact that was held in solitary confinement? Is it the fact that he was held by a foreign government unjustly? Is it that he didn't deserve such inhumane treatment, i.e., to be placed in isolation from other people? I dare say, "Bauer's ordeal only holds America's attention because he is a white male... And, such injustices aren't supposed to happen to white males."

I am always embittered at the site of injustice. I should hope you feel strongly about injustice too. It is a matter of the human condition. It is a matter of societal oppression. It is a matter of the heart that may one day visit *your* doorstep. You should care. Allowing Shane Bauer to be the authoritative voice on solitary confinement is a slap in the face to Black males. His elevation as spokesperson de facto silences the voice of the majority of victims; that insults and assaults justice [movements] around the world.

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