

BACKGROUND

- Solitary confinement exists in all 50 states, but the UN considers it a form of psychological torture that devastates humanity.
- Reform of the practice requires more than just facts– it demands empathy to grasp isolation’s psychological effects.
- This study explores how first-person narratives can drive transformative change in solitary confinement policies.

METHODS

1. Collected first-hand testimonies and psychological insights from the Solitary Watch Archive (Voices from Solitary).
2. Literary analysis of Albert Woodfox’s memoir: *Solitary* (2019), account of 40+ years spent in solitary confinement.
3. Employed the ethical frameworks posed by Amy Coplan’s *Understanding Empathy*.
4. Explored existing reform legislation and any relation it had to empathy/personal stories.

EMPATHY

- Affective Matching: Recognizing and mirroring the emotions of others to foster understanding and connection.
- Emotional Contagion: Individuals unconsciously imitate and adopt the emotions of others.

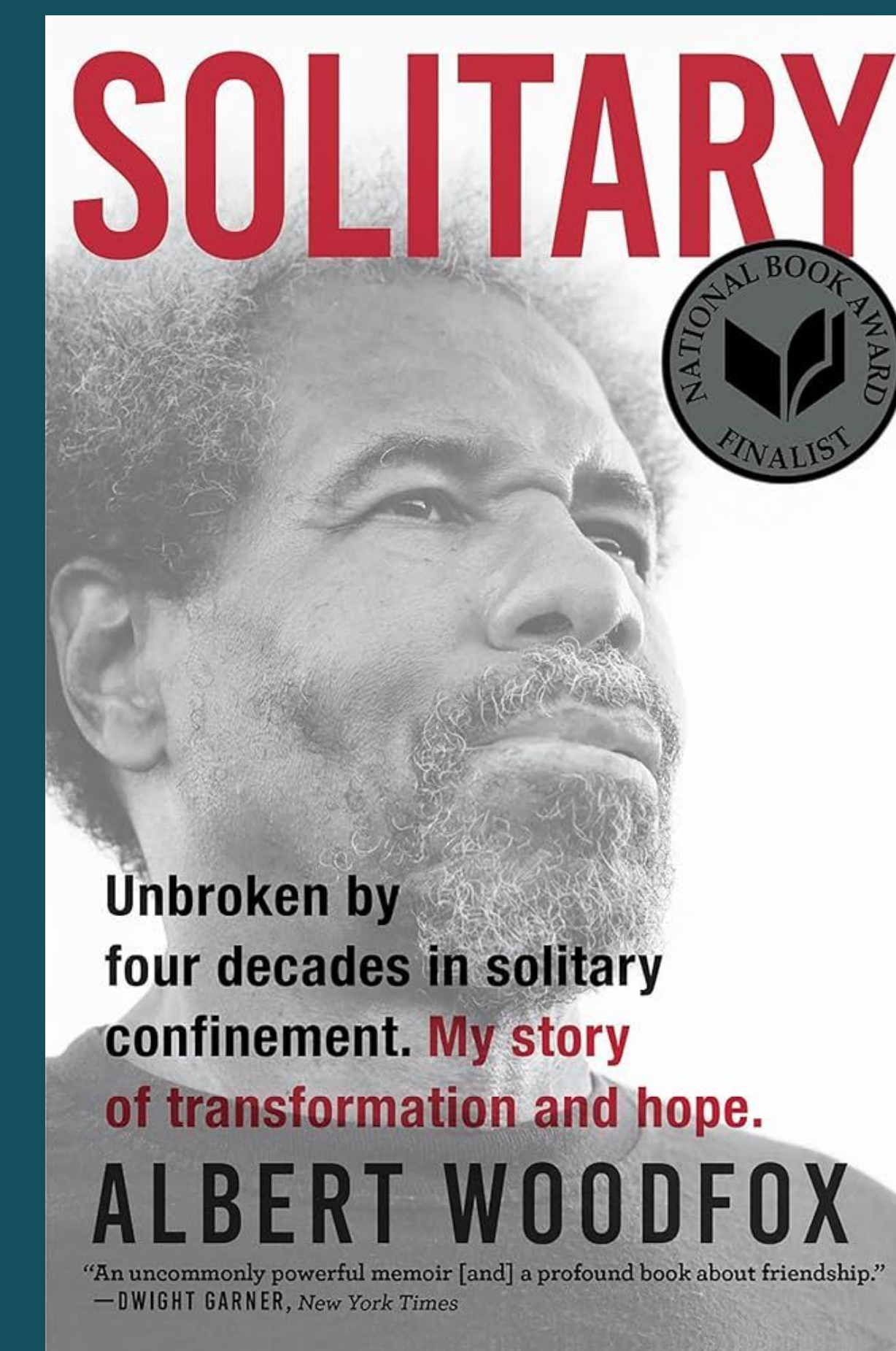
From Facts to Feelings: The Role of Empathy in Solitary Confinement Reform

Sarah Mazar



“As human beings, we need to insist on the humane treatment of prisoners and the rehabilitation and education of prisoners.”

– Albert Woodfox, *Solitary*



LEGISLATION

- HALT Solitary Confinement Act (New York) 2021 – Aims to end the use of solitary confinement for vulnerable populations and limit its use in New York State.
- PROTECT Act (Federal Level) 2021 – Promoting Rehabilitation, Oversight, and Treatment of Solitary Confinement.
- Obama’s ban of Solitary Confinement for juveniles in federal prisons.
- Effective and Humane Treatment of Youth Act of 2015 – “Kalief’s Law”

FINDINGS

- Testimonies contributed to legislative efforts to reduce solitary confinement (voters expressing support for reform).
- Woodfox’s narrative drew national attention, sparking discussions on reform. His experience was used in Amnesty International Campaigns and UN reports.
- The story of Kalief Browder gained a lot of attention, being given a Netflix documentary, and referenced in a Jay-Z song. His story has since been used in many legislative debates.
- Ultimately, empathy-driven advocacy has proven effective in inspiring change.



References!

