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I would like to invite you to remember with me your teenage years. For some of us that is a long time ago. For others, not so far away. In fact maybe some of you reading this are teens now. But whatever your age, would you be willing to take a few moments to experience yourself as a teen? If you can, remember a time when you may have broken the law in some way. It may have been an experiment in shop-lifting. It may have been driving under the influence of alcohol. It may have been smoking pot or exploring some other illicit drug. It may have been hanging out with a gang (or a fraternity house) whose membership required you doing something dangerous or illegal or harmful to another. I remember a neighbor boy of mine. He had just gotten his driver's license. He was driving with his girlfriend to see a movie, about an hour's drive from where we lived, in what was for us the big city of Sacramento. He was in an accident and his girlfriend was killed. I don't think he was under the influence, just a novice driver that made a deadly mistake. He was arrested and tried for involuntary manslaughter. I'm not sure what happened to him. I just remember feeling shocked that this boy I knew to be the younger kid next door was on trial for murder!

These things happen. And if we can't remember breaking the law as a kid, we can probably call to mind friends who did. We know that the executive function of the brain is not fully developed in us humans until we're in our mid to late twenties. That means we make stupid decisions. That means that the part of the brain that is responsible for inhibiting impulse is still developing. That means that we, as adults, allow a little more latitude to kids when they make impulsive choices that lead to negative consequences.

(And we also know from ACE studies (reference) that the more ACEs we have the more likely our developing brains are negatively impacted.)

Now, imagine you are arrested for possession of marijuana, or shoplifting, or for endangering the life of that new freshman you hazed on behalf of your football team.

Imagine you are hand-cuffed, stripped naked and searched in the private parts of your body. Imagine that these uniformed people who take you by the arm through heavy doors that clang shut behind you are brusque, unsmiling and formidable. Imagine how afraid you are. Imagine how you might cover that fear with bravado and opposition. Such rebelliousness can land you in solitary confinement. Or perhaps you are too young to be

placed in the general population. Maybe you are only fourteen years old... or even younger. The only place they have for you is a windowless room with four white walls. Imagine being in such a place for days... or weeks... or even months.

If we did this as parents to our children we would be arrested for child abuse. But the State is empowered by we, the people, to do just that.

I believe that we the people would not stand for this if we were truly aware of these practices. This is the reason I am writing to you. I believe if we truly knew that a 16 year old girl who failed to appear in court for truancy tickets she received for being late to school was put in solitary after refusing to socialize or eat, we would be appalled. I believe if we knew how to take action to change this we would do it. This same girl writes of solitary *"It was dehumanizing. It felt like I wasn't even a person in society. Nobody could see me. I couldn't see nobody. So it feels like you not even there."*

<http://www.corrections.com/news/article/35445-juvenile-solitary-confinement-modern-day-torture-in-the-us>

Denard, now 19, told JJIE she ended up at Los Padrinos for a month because she failed to appear for court dates for truancy tickets she received for being late for school and was put in solitary after refusing to socialize or eat. (She graduated from high school in 2011 and now works as a youth organizer for the [Youth Justice Coalition](#), which fights race, gender and class inequality in Los Angeles County's and California's juvenile justice systems.)

While in solitary, Denard came out of her cell only to use the bathroom and to shower and had little contact with others and no reading or writing materials.

If she weren't in solitary, Denard said, she could have been doing homework or something productive that would have helped rehabilitate her instead of languishing in her cell.

Of solitary, Denard said: "It was dehumanizing. It felt like I wasn't even a person in society. Nobody could see me. I couldn't see nobody. So it feels like you not even there."

Thus, like thousands of other children in the United States each year, Tanisha Denard became all but invisible – in the largely hidden world of juvenile solitary confinement.

(A United Nations human rights expert strongly condemned the U.S. on Tuesday for being the "only State in the world that still sentences children to life imprisonment without the opportunity for parole," thereby imposing cruel, inhuman, and degrading punishment.

Juan Méndez, the Special Rapporteur on torture, made the comments in a [report](#) to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

<http://www.commondreams.org/news/2015/03/10/cruel-and-inhuman-un-slams-us-only-nation-sentences-children-die-prison>)

<https://www.aclu.org/files/assets/Alone%20and%20Afraid%20COMPLETE%20FINAL.pdf>

<http://www.npr.org/series/5584841/life-in-solitary-confinement>