

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/02/21/occupy-prison-protests-in-california-oppose-use-of-solitary-confinement/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | February 21, 2012

Solitary confinement was very much on the agenda during yesterdays Occupy for Prisoners protests at more than a dozen sites around the country. This was particularly true in California, where recent [prisoner hunger strikes](#) have called attention to conditons in the states all-solitary Security Housing Units (SHUs) and Administrative Segregation Units (ASUs).

The largest rally was staged at the east gate of San Quentin, north of San Francisco, which is the states oldest prison and the home of its death row. At least 700 people gathered there on Monday afternoon for a peaceful demonstration. As the *Guardian* reports:

The call to protest was issued by activists with the Occupy Oakland movement and was co-ordinated to coincide with waves of prison hunger strikes that began at Californias Pelican Bay prison in July. Demonstrators denounced the use of restrictive isolation units as infringement upon fundamental human rights

Sarah Shourd, Josh Fattal and Shane Bauer the American hikers who were held for over a year by Iranian authorities took part in demonstrations outside San Quentin prison in Marin County, California. Addressing the crowd, Shourd described the psychological impact of solitary confinement, saying her 14 and a half months without human contact drove her to beat the walls of her cell until her knuckles bled. Shourd noted that Nelson Mandela described the two weeks he spent in solitary confinement as the most dehumanising experience he had ever been through.

In Iran the first thing they do is put you in solitary, Fattal added.

Bauer said a prisoners greatest fear is being forgotten. He described how hunger strikes became the hikers own greatest weapon in pushing their captors to heed their demands. According to Bauer, however, the most influential force for changing their quality of life while being held in Iran was the result of pressure applied by those outside the prison. It was for that fact, Bauer argued, that this movement, this Occupy movement, needs to permeate the prisons.

Demonstrators are broadly calling for the abolition of inhumane prison conditions, and the elimination of policies such as capital punishment, life sentences without the possibility of parole and so-called three strikes, youre out laws.

Ironically but perhaps predictably prison officials responded to news of the impending protest by increasing restrictions on prisoners. According to the [San Francisco Chronicle](#), San Quentin was placed on lockdown, meaning prisoners were kept in their cells, in anticipation of the protest.

While the rally was taking place at San Quentin, another group of about 100 advocates [was demonstrating](#) in front of the Los Angeles County Jail. Members of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT), ACLU of Southern California, and California Families to Abolish Solitary Confinement were there to protest long-term solitary confinement in American prisons, show support for prisoners, and advocate for legislation that would limit the use of solitary confinement, according to a [statement from NRCAT](#).

One attendee, NRCAT board member Virginia Classick, said that the event was an opportunity to be in solidarity with family members inside Californias prisons and jails, and to be visible as part of the witness to a practice that the religious coalition considers a form of torture. The groups executive director, Rev. Richard Killmer, stated: Long-term solitary confinement denigrates a persons inherent dignity and hinders genuine rehabilitation. As people of faith, we have been deeply concerned about prison conditions in California that led to the recent prisoner hunger strikes.

James Ridgeway (1936-2021) was the founder and co-director of Solitary Watch. An investigative journalist for over 60 years, he served as Washington Correspondent for the Village Voice and Mother Jones, reporting domestically on subjects ranging from electoral politics to corporate malfeasance to the rise of the racist far-right, and abroad from Central America, Northern Ireland, Eastern Europe, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia. Earlier, he wrote for The New Republic and Ramparts, and his work appeared in dozens of other publications. He was the co-director of two films and author of 20 books, including a forthcoming posthumous edition of his groundbreaking 1991 work on the far right, Blood in the Face. Jean Casella is the director of Solitary Watch. She has also published work in The Guardian, The Nation, and Mother Jones, and is co-editor of the book Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement. She has received

a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship. She tweets @solitarywatch.

Accurate information and authentic storytelling can serve as powerful antidotes to ignorance and injustice. We have helped generate public awareness, mainstream media attention, and informed policymaking on what was once an invisible domestic human rights crisis.

Only with your support can we continue this groundbreaking work, shining light into the darkest corners of the U.S. criminal punishment system.

by [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

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Good Article thx

well done the world needs to see solitary is not ok it dose not work and no one should be forced to undergo it unwilly may thare we light in the darknes of justice

Today's article in the Atlantic asks the question:

Why Dont Americans Riot Anymore?

In the summery EMILY BADGER writes:

Authorities have ramped up their surveillance and control tactics along with the countrys prison population which puts a damper on organizing in the first place. And Katz points in particular to a general de-politicization in American life that undercuts communities likelihood for civil action. Its not that our urban problems have gone away (while they remain in Athens, London and Paris). But some of the capacity to fight them has.

Its good that we dont have mass civil violence, for sure, Katz says. But the question is: Why dont we have more political mobilization?

<http://www.theatlanticcities.com/politics/2012/02/what-dont-americans-riot-anymore/1274/>

Howard Zinn answered that question when he wrote on page 635 of his book
The Peoples History of United States:

In a system of intimidation and control, people do not show how much they know, how deeply they feel, until their practical sense informs them they can do so without being destroyed.

There are no surprises here.

I would argue that the authorities actually want activist to use violence so they can crush the prison movement just as they did in the 1970s. Any violence could and will be used to scare the public into giving them a free hand to move against anyone who speaks out.

Read The Rise and Fall of Californias Radical Prison Movement by Eric Cummins.

Know and understand the history he writes about to avoid the errors of the 70s that brought us the SuperMax and the use of Solitary Confinement.

So far the movement seems to be aware of what they are up against.

The energy level is certainly impressive and indicative of a spirit within the chorus chanting their dissention on solitary confinement methods.

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