

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | March 17, 2011

The solitary confinement of Army Pfc. Bradley Manning in a Marine Corps Brig in Quantico, Virginia, is now approaching its tenth month. In addition to sporadic [on-the-ground protests](#), a growing chorus of media and activist voices is calling for an end to Mannings appalling treatment. Implicitly or explicitly, they link the accused WikiLeaks fate to that of tens of thousands of other U.S. prisoners held in solitary, and shed new light on a widespread and torturous practice.

Yesterday the [ACLU sent a letter](#) to the Defense Secretary Robert Gates, charging that the gratuitously harsh treatment of Bradley Manning violates fundamental constitutional norms. The letter states:

The Supreme Court has long held that the government violates the Eighth Amendments ban on cruel and unusual punishment whenever it unnecessarily and wantonly inflicts pain. No legitimate purpose is served by keeping Private Manning stripped naked; in prolonged isolated confinement and utter idleness; subjected to sleep deprivation through repeated physical inspections throughout the night; deprived of any meaningful opportunity to exercise, even in his cell; and stripped of his reading glasses so that he cannot read. Absent any evident justification, such treatment is clearly forbidden by our Constitution

President Obama recently stated that Private Mannings conditions comply with the Pentagons basic standards. Given that those standards apparently permit Private Manning to be subjected to plainly unconstitutional conditions, it is clear that the Department of Defense must adapt its standards to meet the demands of the Constitution.

[Amnesty International sent a letter](#) to Gates in January, and [amplified its protests](#) last week. Yesterday, [Human Rights Watch issued a statement](#) calling on the U.S. government to publicly explain the precise reasons behind extremely restrictive and possibly punitive and degrading treatment that Army Private First Class Bradley Manning alleges he has received while detained at the brig at Marine Corps Base Quantico in Virginia.

NPRs [On Point](#) this morning spent a full hour on Manning, and the show includes a good rundown of the controversy over his confinement. [Mainstream](#) publications have joined progressive critics like Salons [Glenn Greenwald](#) in decrying Mannings treatment. Earlier this week they were joined by the conservative [National Review](#), which declared that he does not deserve arbitrary and pointless abuse.

An editorial on Manning in Mondays [New York Times](#) charged that the military has been treating him abusively, in a way that conjures creepy memories of how the Bush administration used to treat terror suspects. Apparently in response to protests from the Pentagon, the *Times* today issued a clarification: *Private Manning, unlike most other prisoners, is never allowed to mingle with other prisoners. We consider that to be solitary confinement, but the Pentagon says it is not because he is allowed to shout to prisoners elsewhere in his cellblock. Our editorial criticized Private Mannings detention conditions because he must strip every night and hand over his clothes to a guard (unlike most other prisoners). The Pentagon says this is not forced nudity because he is then given a Velcro-secured wrap-around smock that he may sleep in.*

One of the most powerful new pieces on Bradley Manning comes from Dr. Terry Kupers, a psychiatrist and one of a handful of experts on the dire psychological effects of solitary confinement. In a [commentary for CNN](#) earlier this week, Kupers writes: The problem with the argument that Manning is being kept in long-term solitary confinement to prevent his suicide is that long-term solitary confinement causes suicide. He continues:

One of the most stunning statistics in criminology today is that, on average, 50% of U.S. prisoner suicides happen among the 2% to 8% of prisoners who are in solitary confinement, also known as segregation. When I tour prisons as I prepare for expert testimony in class-action lawsuits, many prisoners living in isolation tell me they despair of ever being released from solitary.

And there is an objective basis to their fear: One of the many psychiatric symptoms known to be bred in solitary is mounting anger, plus the dread that losing control of that anger will lead to more disciplinary infractions and a longer stint in segregation. So the prisoner despairs of ever gaining more freedom, and that despair leads to suicide.

Suicide is merely the tip of the iceberg. Solitary confinement breaks prisoners down and practically guarantees they will never function normally in society again. This explains a troubling rise in the recidivism rate since the advent in the late 1980s of wholesale solitary confinement in supermaximum-security prisons.

Long-term solitary confinement causes many psychiatric symptoms, including mental breakdowns. Even the relatively stable prisoner in segregation experiences mounting anxiety, paranoia, an inability to concentrate, somatic symptoms, despair and anger. But the prisoner prone to emotional disorder falls apart

As Kupers points out, secrecy is a necessary precondition for abuse in the nations largely invisible supermax prisons and solitary confinement units:

What goes on in the isolation prison unit is a secret unsurprising if visits are discouraged or difficult, and the media is excluded. The governments secrecy about Mannings condition is consistent with the policy on the part of departments of correction to bar the media from interviewing prisoners and to refuse to release information about the use of stun guns and riot guns in solitary confinement units. This kind of secrecy is a necessary precondition for abuse. Indeed, in my investigations of supermaximum-security units around the country, I find unspeakable abuses, including senseless deprivations of clothing and inappropriate beatings.

If nothing else, the ongoing suffering of Bradley Manning is serving to pierce the veil of secrecy that surrounds these all-American torture chambers.



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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I am the person that reported CCA/Wilkinson County, Ms. to Solitary Watch and the ACLU. I reported the drug investigation that caused the warden at that time to be re-located. I would suggest that you contact the new warden, he appears to be concerned and involved with human rights for prisoners. If you get no response write Amnesty International for relief, or at least an investigation into the cruel and unusual practices of CCA. As I stated in my e-mail. I will never quit fighting for my son or any other inmate being abused. Please keep trying, a federal civil rights law suit is not beyond question, file a 1983 Civil rights law suit and name CCA as the Defendant and the officers involved as the et.al. defendants. Please feel free to contact me at anytime.

Respectfully

Donald Hipps

i also have a son at CCA Wilkinson County and we are going through our own nightmare. three guards beat my son while his hands were handcuffed behind his back causing 5 teeth to be smashed out and over 100 stitches in his face. the prison is keeping my son from communicating, not only with me, but also his lawyer. they have denied him papers from his lawyer, they have denied him telephone conversation with his lawyer. they have denied him the right to give his signature on HIPAA forms for his lawyer. they are keeping him in solitary confinement and will not allow him any communication at all. no phone calls, no visits, no letters. i have started investigating on my own, on the internet and am shocked by what i am finding out about this prison. i found an article about the abuse and beating of my son in Dec. 2011, and a reporter is asking why nothing has been done. i tried to press charges against the guards who beat my son and was told that the DA would not file them because he works for the

prison.
this is only a small portion of what has happened to my son.
ACLU, Solitary Watch, please let me know what else i can do.
Anyone who can help, please i am begging

I have a son in a private prison,(CCA) in Mississippi. He exposed a cover-up by the Warden of the Wilkerson County Facility in Woodville, MS. involving the introduction of drugs into her institution by HER trustee. Of course, prisoner got high. All the prisoners were recommended to return to MDOC Central Prison, (the infamous Parchman Prison) for a adjustment program. As it stands, my Son was ordered, by the Courts, to be sent to another prison other than parchman after he won a law suit against prison officials at parchman for being held in solitary for almost 10 years. He was stabbed during this lawsuit by other inmates let into his exercise cage. The stabbing were view by, allowed to take place by prison guards and officials. Luckily he survived, thus he was successful in his lawsuit and was moved. Now that he, and many others, including the Wardens personal trustee were found to be Dirty(using the Drugs that were introduced by the trustee that worked for the Warden, and is the only inmate to have access to the outside of this Maximum security prison, and all but the Wardens trustee were punished. To make a long story short, the institution put the word out that my son was the one who snitched out the drug mule after he evaded punishment and was now at risk for violence from other prisoners. I complained and requested he be placed in one of the two Protective Custody Pods that are at Wilkerson. He was placed in F. The others were either left alone, or placed in C pod. F pod is a gang pod and is ran by the Wardens group. The C pod is for inmates that are at high risk of being harmed. Again I complained and all my Son received was solitary confinement. He is still in solitary confinement, after 10 years in solitary at Parchman prison he is not in good health and imagines this is all beginning again. What is wrong with Mississippi Gov., are they all so greedy that a few dollars in their pockets will allow them to sleep at night? Are there any individuals, other than caring and loving relatives that care. Well, I am almost 70 years old, have nothing to lose, wouldnt care anyway, but I am going to do my best to bring Correction Corp. of America to light. They believe in solitary as a way to hide and shut the abuse and illegal acts away from the public. Unfortunately, it hasnt worked in the past, and will not work now, I will fight in every court of the land to save my son from the profit mongering corporation CCA is. Thank you ACLU for your help, Solitary Watch for you intervention in situations such as my Sons and many others remember, convict or not, humans are humans, that is where we derive the term humane treatment.

I have heard from Marina Drummer , Community Futures Collective, that the ACLU and Human Rights Watch are initiating an international campaigns to abolish the increasing and extended use of solitary. She credits Jim Ridgeways remarkable eye, ear, and pen for this sudden across-the-board interest. You all should get enormous credit for exposing this criminal treatment of Bradley Manning. These prison guards are sadistic savages and deserve a modern version of the Nuremberg Trials.

The system is designed to break people down so they will cooperate with investigators. In addition the authorities want to scare any others contemplating taking such actions as the accused. These tactics are disturbing regardless if Manning had already been convicted of the charges. Other inmates such as the Angola 3 began their isolation before being convicted of killing the guard.

The Angola 3 and Silversteins isolation are clearly meant as a warning to other inmates not to kill another guard and not for security purposes alone.

It doesnt matter if a guard is an abusive deviant playing dangerous harassing mind games on inmates he supervises and whom have no way of avoiding the guard. Only forced submission in this environment where respect is valued more than life itself is acceptable. This is a very dangerous game to play. Add in the uncontrollable urge to act out violently brought on by an inmates isolation and the guards are in even greater danger.

Back to Manning I worry for his safety in the General Population. I dont think he will last a week on the mainline before he is turned out and ends up being someones old lady or is pimped out.

Just read the article below to understand what this means. Over 200k others suffered this fate last year alone.

Overall maybe he is better off where he is if the authorities stop the sleep deprivation and other such tactics. My guess is this wont happen until they are forced to relent. Judging from the other cases I mentioned dont hold your breath.

i hope he is freed from this hell no one should have to suffer such may there be light in the darknes of justice

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Solitary Watch

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