

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2014/02/02/voices-solitary-walk-life-inside-usp-lewisburgs-smu/>

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by [Voices from Solitary](#) | February 2, 2014



The following account comes from [Live from Lockdown](#), a website focused on using technology to provide voice and access to gang leaders and other influential inmates who are known personally by the community. Rather than glamorize street gangs, the mission of LIVE is to utilize gang leadership as credible messengers to provide an unvarnished view of prison and the harsh reality facing gang members who are behind bars. A message delivered by those best equipped to deliver it to our youth in a way that will ensure the message is received, believed and heeded.

Many of Live from Lockdowns authors are doing time in the Special Management Unit, or SMU, at the U.S. Penitentiary in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, which holds dozens of gang members convicted under federal racketeering charges. Lewisburgs SMU holds men in 23- to 24-hour lockdown. Most are double-celled, and a few are triple-celled, in cells originally designed for one persona practice increasingly common in the federal Bureau of Prisons, as it claims reductions in its use of solitary confinement. [This piece](#) was written last year by Quaheem Edwards, who is 6 years into a 20-year sentence.

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The white paint on the walls that surround me is chipped and stained from years of blood, sweat and tears. The doorways are so small you have to enter sideways and even a person standing at 5 feet 9 inches has to kneel. You may hear the saying Prison is prison. This is far from being true.

This place where I lay my head every night may be the size of a walk in closet and that is without the normal furnishings. But even with the usual stainless steel sink and toilet, bunkbeds and table, these cells are only enough room for one person. If you have a roommate (and most likely you will) the two of you cant even be on the floor at the same time. In this place there are holes in the walls where spiders and other insects hide until they think were asleep.

Its hot as hell outside. I know America can relate to this summers heat wave. Now picture being trapped in a room where the window barely opens; not to mention the 12-foot pipe that sits in the corner of the cells. All year long this pipe is beaming! Im talking about a pipe that is so hot, we can boil water in at least twenty minutes! In the hallways on the tiers there are two fans. What good are they on the other side of the door? Our only hope for not passing out is covering these pipes with our sheets and blankets then sleeping by the door. But remember, purchase ambien online its two of us in a cell

Welcome to USP Lewisburg a.k.a. The Big House, recently labeled the (S.M.U.) Special Management Unit in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. This is a super-max prison where you are locked down 23-hours a day with the chance of one our rec, but even that is not guaranteed. This is an 18-24 month program originally designed for inmates who were/are unable to conduct themselves respectfully in population. The SMU Program is ran from three institutions. The others are in Louisana and Alabama, but Lewisburg is by far the worst of the worst.

This is a place where speaking your mind can get you handcuffed and shackled with a belly chain. You can be in this position for anywhere from 72-hours to weeks, maybe even months. You are stripped down to your boxers and in a cell barefoot. A cell that may not

have been cleaned in months! Imagine having to use the toilet shackled down..It is impossible to wipe yourself properly. Depending on what side of the prison you're housed in, you may not even get a shower.

Now you're probably wondering what are we doing to get this treatment. Don't get me wrong, there are some of us who raise hell but also, as I mentioned earlier, as little as speaking your mind will get you tied down. And the cuffs and shackles are tight to the point where your skin peels and bleeds. Where I live is far beyond inhumane. the treatment is brutal and has pushed many over the edge to commit suicide.

Imagine being locked in a cage with another inmate holding a shank (knife). God forbid if you're getting stabbed, the person has at least a 30-second head start before the C.O.s show up. Even then they don't go into the cages until both inmates are cuffed. You could be struggling to find your last breath and may be asked to Cuff Up.

Welcome to the Big House!

This isn't a place for any human being. If you have been walking with me through this story, please take heed. This is as real as it gets. Brothers are dying behind these walls and the days continue like nothing ever happened.

To the children of today's society, don't become a victim to these surroundings because everything is a cover up. What you see on the Discovery Channel and MSNBC is only what they're allowed to broadcast. Those programs are edited to scare kids and protect the prisons. This here on LIVEFROMLOCKDOWN.COM is as real as it gets.

To our youth, please take heed to situations and circumstances such as mine and stay positive. They have a cell open for the tough guys too.

The Voices from Solitary series publishes dispatches from people surviving the lived experience of solitary confinement.

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 [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 30, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 19, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 6, 2022

Solitary Watch encourages comments and welcomes a range of ideas, opinions, debates, and respectful disagreement. We do not allow name-calling, bullying, cursing, or personal attacks of any kind. Any embedded links should be to information relevant to the conversation. Comments that violate these guidelines will be removed, and repeat offenders will be blocked. Thank you for your cooperation.

I also find myself in this situation calling the big house home. even though it's my dad living there I find myself traumatized thinking about this inhumane treatment he's enduring one phone call a month ; dad has 3 kids so who should he call. if I go visit it'll be a video conference call no hugs no contact at all. I feel solitary confinement only helps the prison industrial complex in one way which is to remove shot callers but they fail to realize this just creates try outs for next in line and by the way for every influential person at Lewisburg there's a 100 more dangerous in general population at all other prisons.

If we treated our children like that we would go to prison so how do we get them to realize they are people who need love and help not more punishment. I realize they are being punished but no one needs hatred and bullying to the point of confinement with chains. or put in solitary confinement. I wish the churches had this job of fixing a broken spirit. instead of government taking harsh measures to make a person useless. But Prisons is the biggest industry in the world above gambling and prostitution.

This comment may not pertain to the article but we who are working to end solitary confinement for the mentally ill, young people 16-21 at Rikers Island face a Board Of Correction who for the past two years since we introduced our petition for alternatives to solitary confinement form committees, go to university students to research other cities who have replaced solitary with humane practices, who will stall for the next 11 months preparing rules and then asking interested groups to testify before voting in or out these new rules. I say, Board of Correction , you have JAC NYC Jails Action Coalition petition outlining in detail alternatives to solitary; you have the new bill introduced by Senator Parker and Assemblyman Aubrey, which in details gives rules, regulations dealing with alternatives to solitary and still maintain order. I have not heard any comment from the Board in meetings with their members if what we suggest is viable , would be acceptable to COBA, the council or what changes or additions should be made so security and safety is provided for officers and incarcerated people. When I met with Norman Seabrook on my own , not as a member of any organization , group or non-profit I said the petition I played a small roll in formulating protects officers and inmates and if I felt that the changes would endanger one correction officer I would walk away from the movement. Based on my question at the press release of his bill, the Assemblyman agreed that no matter what rule , regulation , if we don't get the officers educated and humane one of our brothers and sisters will be violated nevertheless. Its the spirit of the law, not the letter of the law. Like it or not, while revenge and hatred is a great temporary feeling , you will have to deal with the correction officers individually and join with the few good ones to bring real change and overthrow the three

union heads. I intend to contact 51 council members and ask they force correction officers to have an Associate Degree in Criminal Justice prior to joining the force. Brains not brawn. The ultimate solution to jails and prisons is an educational system that works, treatment facilities other than Rikers for the Mentally ill, and an economic system where everyone has a living wage job.

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