

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [Sal Rodriguez](#) | September 6, 2011

The following is excerpted from a letter from Alfred Sandoval, a Pelican Bay SHU inmate and one of the original leaders and participants in this summer's three-week hunger strike. Addressed to All Media, Prisons Supporters, etc., it was written on June 26th, a few days before the strike began. Sandoval describes his own experiences, and outlines a series of abuses and factors that he feels made the hunger strike necessary.

Let me begin with a quote The degree of civilization may be judged by entering its prisons.

As a prisoner housed in the isolation control unit known as the Short Corridor of Pelican Bay State Prison, D-Facility SHU, I decided to write and expose and hopefully bring attention to the daily abuses being committed by administrators and correctional officers as part of a concerted effort led by the Office of Correctional Security (OCS) to psychologically and physically break prisoners by any means.

In 2001 I was transferred to this gulag from San Quentin's Death Row where I had spent approximately 15 years in the adjustment center. On the first day I arrived, I was told in no uncertain terms that I would die here one way or another and that I was a cancer to be cut out. I went out to court and was returned in 2003. When I got my property I happened across a confidential memorandum that had somehow got mixed in with my legal materials. The title read The Function of the Control SHU units and went on to outline a plan of attack for prison administrators and Investigation units. ISU, IGI, LEIU to follow. Cited was the function is to reduce prisoners to the state of submission essential for their ideological conversion that failing, the next step is to reduce them to a state of psychological incompetence sufficient to neutralize them as efficient self-directed antagonists. That failing, the only alternative is to destroy them. Preferably by making them desperate enough to destroy themselves.

In approximately 2005, before the OCS was formally created, the then secure state security unit (SSU) and various members of gang investigation units throughout the State of California compiled a list of alleged prison gang members to be targeted for various degrees of abuses to be broken.

First isolation: Control and restrict all information. In January 2006 approximately 200-2500 prisoners were rehoused into a special isolation control unit which is the Short Corridor of D-Facility and then the underground confidential restrictions began; all mail, including legal are rerouted to the IGI unit. Legal mail is routinely opened illegally and regular generally mail is stopped, delayed or even returned to sender without notification. Numerous family members and friends of these prisoners have received anonymous letters and phone calls warning them of being used by gang members in an attempt to create friction and further isolate the prisoners.

Another underground regulation is no talking. Prisoners are routinely disciplined via 115 Rule Violation Report, the alleged violation is refusing a direct order and 128 Information Chronos are written and cite gang activities which can be just saying hello to a neighbor and these fabrications are used to deny inactive status, deny visits, take canteen privileges or television for up to 90 days. These punishments depend on everything and nothing. Arbitrary is the word. Even visitors lose their right to speak to other visitors and the IGI and ISU routinely gosestep through the visiting room and even ride in the visitors bus as an intimidation tactic.

Second, medical care is intentionally denied and withheld under the debrief or die doctrine and the gang unit oversees medical procedures with the chief medical officer, medical hardships are denied and prisoners are routinely questioned while under anesthesia by members of the IGI because of this many prisoners refuse necessary medical procedures. Even the psyche visits are monitored by the IGI unit and I was told by a psychologist that the IGI had asked him to disclose our conversation, he stated that he refused, but I believed that was because it was a court ordered observation. But the chief medical officer allows the gang unit to review prisoners confidential medical files

Third, food is routinely served on dirty trays, portions are small and a lot of the food is spoiled, overcooked-burnt and undercooked, beans and rice is often crunchy. Since January an average of five days a week some of the prisoners can be heard yelling that the bread is green, the SHU cook told prisoners to notify the C/O serving the meals and the C/O will decide if the food should be replaced. If you were to read the menu, you would be led to believe that prisoners are being served government meals but in reality most is inedible. For

example vegetarian meals are basically three items, beans, cheese and peanut butter. The baked beans are also called canned vegebeans, seasoned beans, the pinto beans are also Mexican beans, refriedbeans, seasoned beans also, chili beans and just beans. The portions can be ridiculous! At times you can actually count the number of beans, vegetables and even noodles and the C/O will refuse to notify the kitchen or replace the food. One C/O testified on behalf of a prisoners civil rights complaint and the court ordered PBSP to serve proper portions in accordance with federal guidelines of caloric daily intake. Even after that court order, PNSP routinely serves small or spoiled portions on a 602 complaint one prisoner was actually told that its the weekly caloric intake that matters, so prisoners can go hungry for a day or to and good a good portion of greasy food which will add calories. I am one of the fortunate prisoners that is able to supplement by meals with canteen items such as beans and top ramen-cup-a-soup. Actually, those prisoners that cant are extremely thin. But their weight loss will rarely be documented because the weight scale in the D-Medical clinic is off by at least ten pounds.

Code of Silence; prisoners submit 602 grievance forms on a daily basis. I have over one hundred documented with approximately two being granted but I am sure that you may have heard of the code of silence which was exposed in California Senate Hearings on Abuse within the CDCR. Well it does exist and prisoners who file complaints can expect the 602 form to be routinely denied, rejected or just disappear. The Appeals coordinator will and does refuse to even process complaints. This is a department wide problem but here at PBSP there is an underground order to all staff to deny 602s or partly grant them thereby guaranteeing litigation.

You must remember that this is the prison that actually boiled a prisoner, the Madrid V. Gomez case, had officers orchestrating assaults and murders of inmates and these and much more incidents were investigated by the Internal Affairs of PBSP and in 2006 the Office of Inspector General cited that the Internal Affairs of PBSP would turn a blind eye to abuses and mistreatment of prisoners by C/O Staff which is the code of silence. Since 2006, when the Short Corridor was unofficially created, there have been hundreds of incidents of cell doors being opened intentionally and accidentally but only those where prisoners fought are mentioned and documented and used as evidence of the worse of the worst. I believe that most of these incidents have been orchestrated because I have overheard C/Os talking about how they were unable to shoot prisoners because they only stood at their assigned cell doors.

Assaults on restrained/handcuffed prisoners by C/O staff is routinely covered-up by actually charging the prisoner with battery. Assault on staff, resisting or any of a handful of possible charges. Usually if the assaulted prisoner has the audacity to submit a complaint, he will be charged and targeted for more harassment by other C/O staff. Here in this block there is a crew of C/Os who tell us You fucked up by filing that 602, and proceed to tear up the cells. Thats just the way it is.

Personally I expect all kinds of harassment during and before the planned hunger strike, as the department does not want the exposure and bad press. But its the only way to get the word out and expose the filth that is the administration of Pelican Bay State Prison.

Sal Rodriguez was Solitary Watchs first and most prolific intern. Based in Los Angeles, he served as an editorial writer and columnist for the Orange County Register and the Press-Enterprise, and is now the opinion editor for the Southern California News Group.

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

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My fianc and love of my life has always been Daniel Villar also known as Casper from a barrio. In eat Los Angeles. He was sent to the California youth authority at the age of fourteen did two years and as an adult served time in Soledad state prison. He has lost two step sons whom he raised to gang violence. I have seen him make decisions that were hard but he accomplished them. He now works with high risk youth. And is making a real difference in their lives, because he has lived it. So he speaks from experience. I am proud he stepped up to help Alfred Sandoval from the death penalty. I myself dont believe it brings chance to anyone to put a human being to death, it doesnt bring back any one. I showed him a picture of his old friend Alfred Sandoval and I saw the despair in his face. I commend you Mr. Sandoval for educating yourself and standing up for human rights in prisons. There is much racism in our society, the work place, schools everywhere. The big difference is your trying to educate our society to the torture and in humane treatment that goes on in prisons by these racially motivated guards and gruel people. Our president Obama needs to step up have an open an investigation of these isolation units that destroy a mans soul and humanity. This is the United States of America, my Dad fought in Korea for our rights, my uncle died at eighteen at the battle of the bulge, my son served in the U.S. Navy, my brother served in the Army, got three DUIs never crashed or hit anyone and the court send him to CDC. He was put in solitary confinement for about one year. Because they tried to extract him from his cell and a guard was choking him and he bit the guard so he was beaten. I fought the system and he was released, but has been ill ever since that experience destroyed him. So I know the discrimination against Latinos and minorities goes on in these hell holes. Lets make our voices heard for these human beings who are doing there time. What ever happened to rehabilitation, or human dignity. Are we becoming like the terrorist from other countries. I was brought with the belief That We are a Nation based on human rights. No matter

why they have been convicted through due process, they are still human beings. Our society needs to wake up, it may be you sitting in the gulag!

My husband was in the SHU at Pelican Bay for over eight years. He is now serving time in San Quentin A/C which is another torture chamber for the condemned. To put these men in solitary confinement and then release them, or expect them to function as human beings is impossible. If you lock up anybody or anything what do you think it will do eventually? People think that we speak up because these men are our loved ones. Well of course that is how we know what the hell holes are really like. So why do they think that so many people have that are willing to take a stand whether it be 30,00 people or 30 are wrong? There is going to be a rally at San Quentin Prison August 3rd at 2:00 pm I hope people will come and support. God bless us and them.

My husband, Alfred Sandoval, is on his third HS now. Things have only gotten worse. Please make your voices heard!

Alfred I hope things have gotten better. much respect. victor villar

There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health. The truthful lip shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment. (Proverbs 12:18)

In this second round of the HS, the CDC(R) (in a memo to all wardens dated 9/22/11) is not only disallowing families to visit Hunger Strikers, calling this non violent political statement a demonstration that impacts daily operation but is disallowing access to legal visits, thereby denying a constitutional right to access the courts. Without calls, which SHU inmates don't get, canteen items, such as writing materials (all canteen items are removed from cells of HS participants), access to lawyers through legal visits, the CDC(R) is left to spin the story as they like.

My son had told me in a letter, that the SHU at Pelican Bay was mostly Latinos, and that it was this group that started the hunger strike; as a result, the above article grants confirmation to this fact.

On Tuesday, the 6th of September 2011, an article entitled More Inmates, Shorter Terms Possible in Isolation Lockup. was found in the National News section. It is stated within this article that, under the current policy, an inmate must be identified and/or validated as a member of one of seven prison gangs to be housed in a Security Housing Unit indefinitely. The article continues by naming these groups. They are listed as follow with comments from this writer. It is important to know the history of a group before placing a label because any group can be labeled a gang, even a soccer team.

1. La Eme a.k.a Mexican Mafia, which is a Latino group whose members identify with Southern California. Was formed in the late 1950s era at the Folsom Vocational Center. Second, each prison has a separate leadership. What is not mentioned is this: This group speaks the Spanish language, they have direct ties to the Mother country based upon their language, custom, rituals, foods, and family ties directed connected to this Mother country.
2. Nuestra Familia, which is considered the rival Latino group whose members identify with Northern California. Originated in Soledad Prison during the 1960s era. It was established to protect the younger rural Mexican-American inmates from other inmates. Another bit of information not mentioned here with this group is that they are at least three generations and upward, they do not speak the Spanish language, they do not participate in the customs and, rituals, of Mexico. As a result, the Southern group do not like this particular group due to basically this reason. In other words, they are enemies based on being of Mexican descent, but they are denying it by forgetting all that is connected and/or associated with the Mother country.
3. Nuestra Raza, which is a Northern Structure because it is said to be a spin-off of the Nuestra Familia. At this time this writer has not researched out this particular group, but it shall be done later on. For example, sometimes groups are stated to be gangs, when in-essence they are a part of a particular organization, which is not gang related.
4. Aryan Brotherhood, which is a White power group, which is also an off-spring of the KKK. From what I am told, this group do not have lock-down problems unless, they have a confrontation with Blacks and/or Latinos, most of the time they are said to be backing up the guards inside of these institutions within California.
5. Nazi Low-Riders, which is a spin-off group of the Aryan Brotherhood is based in Palmdale California. Some of the people within this group has Spanish surnames.
6. The Black Guerilla Family, which is an African-American group that was originally founded in 1966 at San Quentin State Prison in San Rafael, California by the former Black Panther member by the name of George Jackson. This group's orientation was and still is highly political, it is based on Marxism, its objective is centered in eradication of racism, and maintaining dignity in prison.
7. The Texas Syndicate, which is a Latino group originally drawn from immigrants from Mexico. This group appears to have originated in Folsom Prison in Northern California during the early 1970s era. The group was formed in direct response to the other California prison gangs, which was most notably the Aryan Brotherhood and the Mexican Mafia.

In conclusion, the question would be and/or should be: why was it necessary for these groups to form if they were protected by the correctional officers and officials? It is this writer's belief that they had no protection from the environment they were in, as a result, they formed protection due to the blatant racism within the prison system.

Alfred,

Thank you for sharing your story. You are a brave and honorable man who deserves fair and just treatment. My heart is with you my warrior friend, as it is with all who are suffering at the hands of a corrupt and torturous system. Keep fighting!

Solidarity in Struggle,

Sophie

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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