

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2013/06/20/voices-from-solitary-13-5-square-feet/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

close

Search

close

close

by [Voices from Solitary](#) | June 20, 2013



Menard Correctional Center is the largest maximum security prison in the state of Illinois. A December 2011 report by the [John Howard Association](#), a prison watchdog group, depicts Menard as decrepit, overcrowded, violent, and subject to frequent lockdowns. In the Segregation Unit, two men are housed, often in continuous 24-hour-a-day confinement, in cells designed for one person. The cells are less than five feet wide, with most of that width being taken up by bunks. When the Howard Association visited Menard in December, many men expressed concern about being housed with aggressive cellmates. In the three subsequent months, [three men at Menard were killed](#), allegedly by their cellmates. A fourth, an apparent suicide, [died in solitary](#) in May. The following piece is by an individual serving a year-long stint in the Segregation Unit. He wrote to Solitary Watch describing the deaths, the overcrowding, the lack of physical exercise, and the psychological toll of life in isolated confinement at Menard. James Ridgeway

.....

Here's a little insight on the conditions, mistreatments and violations that have been occurring here at Menard Correctional Center Segregational Unit.

Since January 2013 Menard Correctional Center has had (4) four murders/deaths. The first one occurring on or about January 31, 2013 the second occurring on or about February 17, 2013 the third occurring on or about March 28, 2013 and the fourth occurring on or about May 27, 2013, all due to the malignant conditions and housing that our prisoners are placed in.

In Menard Correctional Center Segregational Unit 90% (percent) of the cells are double-man celled, and more than half of those cells are encased behind iron doors. (Note: many of the prisoners back here in the segregational unit are suffering from periodically being beaten, maced and abused at the hands of racist guards and ranking officials' whim.) The measurements of the cells in this segregational unit are, from door to toilet (in the back of cell) is approximately 8 ft. 6 in. from the wall to the edge of the bunk is 1 ft. 10.5 in. the accessible floor space in this area for (2) two prisoners is only about a total of 13.5 square feet, from the cell entrance to the beginning of the bunk the measurement is or about 1 ft. 4 in. by 1 ft. 10.5 in. a total of about 2.8 square feet of non-accessible floor space.

Prisoners at Menard Correctional Center Segregational Unit are being forced to share a cell that the administration well knows are too small to house (2) two people, for these cells are all actually one man cells. Plus the fact, that many of our prisoners are sharing a cell with prisoners that are on some type of psychotic medication and mood altering drugs, leaving some of our prisoners in a very dangerous and unsafe environment/situation. Now our prisoners must play psychologist with the institution's mental and emotionally disordered prisoners that we are forced to be housed with and more than often this condition leads to violent and physical altercations between the two. (Note: (3) three of the deaths which occurred since January was because of cellmate-on-cellmate physical altercations which lead to one cellmate killing the other or one cellmate causing so severe bodily harm which lead to the other cellmate dying once returned from the outside hospital.

This institution's (Menard C.C.) arbitrary policies are systematically denying myself and other prisoners that are housed in the North 2 segregational unit out of cell exercise (1 hour a day out of cell exercise to segregational/solitary confined prisoners or at least 5 hours a week minimum per state and federal law; see *Fogle v. Pierson*, 435 F.3d 1252, 1259-60, Federal court ruling which entitles that all

segregational/solitary prisoners be given at least 5 hour a week or 1 hour a day out of cell exercise.) The Illinois Constitution Art.II states in pertinent part, in the Department of Correction (IDOC) must provide a healthy environment for the residents of its prisoners. Though this institution clearly violates all state and federal laws. This facility (Menard C.C) not only does not provide us with the adequate out of cell exercise, it also denies us prisoners our adequate showers and barber to groom ourselves in the absence of this institution not allowing us prisoners in segregation to possess our personal trimmers.

This institution (Menard C.C.) is in blatant violation of our eighth amendment constitutional rights not only amounts to cruel and unusual punishment, but it lacks the legitimate penological interest necessary to impose it.

In the case of *Lightfoot v. Walker* 486 7. Supp 528; The Illinois Department of Correction had a former medical Director of the IDOC, by the name of Dr. Ron Shansky, who testified that depriving prisoners of the minimum civilized measures of out of cell exercise and showers that is necessary to maintain a persons physical as well as mental health; (especially those of us whose conditions are such that we are already confined to our cells 24 hours a day.) Dr. Shanskys testimony being the local point of a successful civil suit brought by prisoners at both maximum security prisons Stateville and Menard C.C., plainly served to give actual knowledge of an excessive risk to prisoners exhibiting the adverse psychological effects or deterioration of the cardiovascular system, hardened arteries, atrophying muscles, and musculo skeletal problems. Dr. Shansky specifically warned Menard Corrections what would eventually occur if these conditions continue and many of us prisoners are already exposed to these conditions both psychologically and physically.

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 spent 4 years there. its not a nice place but I survived and improved my life. I spent 2 years in the east house and 2 years in the west house. my best advice is dont do the crime if you cant do the time. no one promised you a hotel room when you did the crime. suck it up and get out of solidarity confinement. be a man and stand up for yourself.

I was in the pit for ten straight years westhouse. southhouse.and easthouse. ive been out now for eleven years still have the mantallity of being inside specially when in croades

Do the crime, do your timeand shut the hell up! No one cares about you assholes. You were warned to be productive citizens and chose not to be, so fuck off.

The thought of these assholes suffering so and getting their just desserts in prison is music to my ears. Thank you! For letting us know just how horrible and miserable it is! I have absolutely zero sympathy for any of these sociopathic murdering raping bastards. May they all continue to suffer. Boo boo

May God bless you & guide you as you continue to speak out and share this information it is needed & I thank you. In IL families need to get together to understand these very things and sometimes we dont know how or where.to start to shine light on what happens behind the wall. But thank brave soldiers like you to open their mouths and speak.

Relevant history from 160 years ago from the original solitary source.

In the 1858 annual report about Eastern State, officials claimed that the prison actually made inmates saner. When inmates did suffer breakdowns, their mental illness was often blamed on self-abusemasturbationwidely believed at the time to drive men insane

Despite this vehement defense of the solitary system, in the period after the Civil War, the regimen at Eastern State was slowly abandoned.

Historians have theorized that the rise in foreign immigrants among the prison population decreased public sympathy for prisoners and made expensive penal reform less politically popular during the postwar period.

Without enough funding to keep the system running, inmates were frequently doubled up in cells. In 1913, the solitary system was officially abandoned.

http://www.legalaffairs.org/issues/January-February-2003/review_brook_janfeb2003.msp

Menard Vital Statistics

Total Population: 3,666

Maximum-Security Population: 3,144

Maximum-Security Rated Capacity: 2,600

The average age of inmates at Menard is 34 years old and 51% of offenders are incarcerated for murder.

The racial breakdown is 62% black, 28% white, and 9% Hispanic. (Wikipedia)

This video lists the ages of the first three victims in 2013 as 25, 64, and 35.

<http://fox2now.com/2013/03/27/third-inmate-dies-at-prison-referred-to-as-gangsters-paradise/>

Idle violent young men with long sentences forced into overcrowded conditions will commit more violence. Yet CBS St. Louis reports:

Illinois Prison Officials Transfer Inmates to Menard Correctional Center in Chester.

June 15, 2013 1:51 PM

CHESTER, Ill. (AP) Illinois prison officials say they've transferred 72 inmates to Menard Correctional Center in the southern Illinois community of Chester.

Illinois Department of Corrections spokesman Tom Shaer says the inmates were moved from Pinckneyville and Lawrence correctional centers to lower the number of prisoners housed in temporary units built in gymnasiums.

Kevin Hirsch is president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local 1175 which represents Menard correctional officers. He says the transfers maintain a dangerous tendency toward overcrowding and understaffing at the prison.

Nothing new:

In May 2009 the Chicago Tribune chronicled a similar homicide in 2004. In that case, corrections officials housed Corey Fox, a convicted murderer with a history of psychotic behavior and violence behind bars, with Joshua Daczewitz, a passive, first-time inmate. Two months later, Fox strangled Daczewitz after guards at Menard Correctional Center allegedly ignored his threat that he would erase his cellmate if he wasn't moved.

P.O. Box 11374

Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

Solitary Watch

Copyright 2022, Solitary Watch

Read about [rights and permissions](#).



Solitary Watch News