

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2010/09/22/solitary-confinement-fuels-cycle-of-violence-at-federal-prison/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | September 22, 2010



The Lewisburg Prison Project is a nonprofit group that provides legal and other assistance to prisoners in Central Pennsylvania. We are dedicated to the principle that prisoners are persons with incontestable rights to justice and compassion. We strive to provide safeguards for their constitutional and human rights. Last week the [Williamsport \(Pennsylvania\) Sun-Gazette](#) drew on statements from the LPP in reporting on the dangerous conditions in the segregation unit at the Federal Prison in Lewisburg.

A special unit for incorrigible inmates in the federal penitentiary here is dangerous for both inmates and staff alike.

The Lewisburg Prison Project, which advocates for inmate rights, has issued a statement alleging the facility is plagued by a plethora of flaws that has increased tensions and may have contributed to three violent inmate deaths between May and July of this year.

The Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary has about 1,100 inmates 200 of who are assigned to support service jobs and live under general population rules. The approximately 900 others are assigned to a Special Management Unit and a multi-step program theoretically designed to help inmates earn their way back into the inmate general populations at other less-restrictive facilities.

When announced in 2008, the Special Management Unit (or SMU) was described as designed to attempt the rehabilitation of problem inmates. However, SMU inmates get one hour of recreation per day, and the other 23 hours each day are spent in cells with an assigned cellmate. The LPP claims the confinement, coupled with cells sometimes being shared by incompatible inmates, has created mayhem.

A statement released by the LPP claimed two of the three deaths were the result of one cellmate attacking another while his hands were cuffed.

In both instances, the attacks are alleged to have occurred after one inmate had inserted his hands through a door slot and had cuffs removed and then attacked his cellmate who was still in cuffs.

The third death is alleged to have been caused by pepper gas fired into a cell to quell an altercation. The deceased, according to the LPP, was asthmatic and the victim of the attack.

The LPP alleged conditions in Lewisburg set up an almost guaranteed cycle of violence (that) strains the prison staff who daily work with people who are effectively caged like animals without adequate psychological counseling, work assignments, exercise, and preparation for eventual release from prison.

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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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The conditions in this and many prisons throughout the country are indeed guaranteed to keep the cycle of violence in motion. When will common sense and a love for humanity bring the change we need to rehabilitate offenders?

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