

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2010/04/10/obamas-plans-is-the-wrong-way-to-close-guantanamo-groups-warn/>

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | April 10, 2010

Part of Obamas plan for fulfillinghis campaign promise to close Guantanamo calls formoving a piece of the notorious detention camp, virtually intact, onto mainland American soil. In [a letter sent to members of Congress](#) this week, a coalition including the ACLU, Amnesty International USA, and the Center for Constitutional Rights warned against this portion of the White House plan for Gitmo detainees, which the groups believe could result in institutionalizing and perpetuating policies that should instead end.

Since December, [the president has been talking about](#) moving a group of some 50 to 100 Guantanamo detainees to a special unit at Thomson Correctional Center in rural Illinois, after the near-empty state prison is purchased and renovated by the federal government. The unit would resemble a federal supermax, but would be run by the Defense Department.

Voices on the right, including many in Congress, have warned against bringing these terrorists (none of whom have been tried or convicted) stateside. But some progressives have a different concern: As [Glenn Greenwald wrote](#) when Obamas plans were first announced, it appears that detainees sent to Thomson could have exactly the same rights or lack thereof as they have now at Guantanamo. The Illinois prison could simply become [Gitmo North](#), another legal black hole where the U.S. Constitution does not apply.

Resistance to the Thomson scheme has been building among civil libertarians and human rights groups for some time, as Spencer Ackerman described in the [Washington Independent](#) last month. These are some of the same groups that strongly supported Obamas pledge to close Guantanamo. But their skepticism has grown as details of the presidents plans emerged. This weeks letter represents the first public statement by a broad coalition of those groups, and it spells out their objections in detail.

We urge you to oppose legislation authorizing, or appropriating federal funds for, the purchase of the Thomson Correctional Center in Thomson, Illinois, unless Congress, at the same time, also enacts a permanent, statutory ban on using the Thomson prison for indefinitely detaining persons without charge or trial, or for holding persons during military commission trials or for serving sentences imposed by military commissions.

All of our organizations strongly support the responsible closing of the Guantanamo Bay detention facility, and we would support using the Thomson facility for holding any detainees now at Guantanamo who may be charged, tried, or sentenced in federal criminal court. However, we strongly oppose transporting the worst of Guantanamo policies of indefinite detention without charge or trial and military commissions to a prison within the United States itself. If used for one or both of these purposes, the purchase of the Thomson prison could result in institutionalizing and perpetuating policies that should instead end.

There is a right way and a wrong way to close Guantanamo, the letter states. It praises the Obama administration for taking some of the right steps including clearing certain detainees for release, and committing others to federal civilian trials. However, it continues, there are two developments over the past year that constitute closing Guantanamo the wrong way.

First, the government has reinstituted the discredited military commissions. The military commissions have now gone through eight years, two statutes, four sets of rules, but have only resulted in three convictions, with two of those convicted detainees now released. By contrast, more than 400 defendants have been convicted of terrorism-related offense in federal criminal courts. The military commissions still do not have any rules based on the new statute, continue to have fundamental problems that could result in their proceedings being held illegal under the Constitution and international law, and deservedly lack credibility both at home and abroad.

Second, the government continues to claim authority to indefinitely detain without charge or trial some of the Guantanamo detainees. Even if there is legal authority to continue to indefinitely detain these men, which many of our groups dispute, the government should make the policy decision that the interests of the United States are better served by either charging a detainee in federal criminal court or repatriating or resettling the detainee.

Based on the governments own statements, it appears that the Defense Department-run portion of the Thomson prison would house only those Guantanamo detainees being held pursuant to Guantanamo policies that should end namely, military commissions and indefinite detention without charge or trial.

In fact, the groups argue, having a facility of this kind operate on American soil would in some ways be worse than allowing it to remain at Gitmo (or Bagram, or elsewhere overseas). While providing an illusion of progress, the move would only reinforce and legitimize unconstitutional practices.

Bringing the practice of indefinite detention without charge or trial to any location within the United States will further harm the rule of law and adherence to the Constitution. Moreover, Thomson could eventually become the place to send other persons held indefinitely without charge or trial with the prospect of detainees being transferred there from Bagram, Afghanistan or new captures brought from other locations around the globe. Once the indefinite detention policy is institutionalized at Thomson, it will be difficult to hold the line at former Guantanamo detainees.

If the government does not intend to provide these Guantanamo detainees with due process through civilian trials, the only other reason for bringing them stateside would be to improve their conditions of confinement. But the idea that this would happen is based upon [two interrelated myths](#): first, the fantasy that American prison conditions are relatively humane; and second, the notion that Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib were Bush-era aberrations.

In fact, U.S. prison reformers know that thousands of American prisoners live in conditions of isolation and deprivation that meet the criteria for torture. Now that the waterboarding at Gitmo has stopped, conditions there are likely no worse (and may in some ways be better) than in the average supermax prison.

In addition, former Guantanamo detainees would no doubt experience the most extreme form of supermax solitary confinement. They would be subject to near-complete isolation, with additional restrictions placed on their contact with other human beings much like the detainees currently living under [Special Administrative Measures](#) (SAMs) or the prisoners in the [Communications Management Units](#) (CMUs) at two federal prisons. Already, these units have been dubbed Little Gitmos.

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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Joshlyn Howard Zinn in his book titled The Peoples History of US put it better than I ever could page 635:

In a highly developed society, the Establishment cannot survive without the obedience and loyalty of millions of people who are given small rewards to keep the system going. These people—the employed, the somewhat privileged—are drawn into an alliance with the elite. They become the guards of the system, buffers between the upper and lower classes. If they stop obeying, the system falls. That will happen, I think, only when all of us who are slightly privileged and slightly uneasy begin to see that we are expendable; that the Establishment, whatever rewards it gives us, will also, if necessary to maintain its control, kill us.

Joshlyn no one person will reverse this machine it will grind you down or toss you into a hole so deep that you will never see the light of day again.

To answer your question no I never spoke to any expert on solitary and I would love to hear what he told you.

There is a place for you to tell your story here. Voices From Solitary.

You know of it because I have seen your posts there.

You are free to read mine that is posted there under memoirs.

I feel for you and everyone that has passed through the Beast.

Use your new freedom wisely to better yourself and if you want to confront the system legally you will need your GED and much more to write the legal papers to do so.

Do not try to slay the beast alone you will be consumed.

Alan for most i would agree with you but let me tell you somethign i more ready for the world then it is for its self you speak on prisons a lot i seen your posts but tell me who is the sorry one when i can even the if not serpas the nashions leading expsert on solitary confinement him self tell me alen have you met face to face with Dr. Stuart E. Grassian he reagared as the leading expert in the nashion on solitary he over 2 decades of studying solitary came named and is the founder of SHU syndrome have you had a man of that stacher think of you as even with him on that wich he stuckyed for over 12 years did a man with that big a tialat ever say he be honered to meet you he did me yes he did job wise your right this world thinkgs a dam thing that ses i got my ged is what shows your smart let me tell you thare rong they siad i should not give up on it they pushed me to do it i my self choose to say no prisons is my strong points and law as well tell me alen how meny judges just my seeing you first glances after four years in the bench mistaked you for a defeces aterny how meny lawyers have you made seechles did you win your first mock trial like me i am no fool for a client alen a dam paper with ged on it is not going to mean shit to me the fackt that i think freely and wisely is whats grate bout me i speak and move lives ever just by being your self make a luch lady want to be a teacher alen have no pity on me have pity on those who can not speak for them self those who are to cowardly to do so those who are brainwashed in to normalty everyone hates the word retard gess what TARDS MAKE THE WORLD GO ROUND we are all tards we all freeks we are all difrent you asck me what is disabilty i say normal we all have have strong points and are week ones and i know what the goverment can do you know what i say to them bring it on i not a fraid of them i rather die fighting then die haveing never tryed i stand my ground and i do not care if it is all of rome standing agest me if i know it rong that they do it i will not stand for it and if that makes me a tarest well dam i just may be radical but i belive in humane justice tell me alen are you that strong grouned on your thouts belivefs and will to do what needs to be done law is my power and i know how to use it hell i not a lawere so tekneclly i cant gie you leagal advise but i can tell you what i would do if i was in your places thares the loop hole for that it is us who say no and dare to think for ourt selfs that are loved for a big good we do or who are marderred for are sacerfices for what was right i can play the goverments game and win it in court if i have to or rase my army from with im the void when i die alen they may not remebare what was said hear today but they will rembar what was done hear i was born to end solitary and god knows i will but you are wise to know your enme befor ingaing them alen may you one day see all that i have and be as strong willed first you must stop seeing likethe goverment you live inder indeed alen i am ready for the world and should it try to fuck with me it will lose for you all ame for the heads that spilt i will go for the hart hopeing you one day see things like me with out haveing to have the painfal past do not asept the tribunals laws as needed standered walk free alen walk free

Joshlyn there is no shame in not being able to spell but there is in a system that could take control of your life for however long that the system had control of you and release you into the a competitive world without a GED. My friend you have been set up to fail in order to keep their beds full. Get back at them by getting your GED, I did back in 1973. Then I joined the service got my GI bill and finished college. You can too. I noticed someone offered you aid awhile back on here. Take it and dont stop trying. Dont let the system win! Knowledge may be power but it is not the same as intelligence. I have seen some dumb college grads and some truly intelligent dropouts. Hold your head up high and show them whats what.

yes we need to shut gitmo no we do not need a fucking supermax to fix it thow we need to do like we would with any other inmates clasfire them and ship them out and if yiu got trubal with one them trafer them agan holy hell it not that hard i mean how meny fucking supermax prison we have oor ones with that sort of unit in them bout ever dam prison dose mabty if we didnt treet them so dam cruilly they will not want to kill us all after this but right now yes if i was one of them who was held in gitmop and i got out you bet i love to kill the usa i mean after how we treeted them i not lieing when i say if they where not hate usa they will be when thare free after how we treeting them and cant blame them i be the same i think usa shows more balls useing thare justice i glad we trying them that way and if we want to not get nuked place them all over not in one places where your just saying plese bom me lol i mean i study rsions suck at spelling and gramer yes i do not have my ged but god i can fix this faster and better them theys goverment ass holes i mean paper means mthing to me wow hhe got something that said he passed the bar holy shit dosent mean he smart i mean judges and lawers say i grate at law why i say f ged f dr. who cares what a paper ses it dosent mean anything in the head realy point is we need to be the biger nashion stick to are justice stick to are normal doings follow the end solitary movment and stop showing we are afra of them fuck build it in my dam back yard for all i care you can breing them all to me and build your dam joail right a round my home for all i care half them i bet if you treet them well willl you as well we should try it some time

The silver lining in all of this is that more attention will be paid to the blight of our fellow citizens held in isolation for excessive and indeterminate lengths of time.

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