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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/03/08/a-time-to-speak-up-prisoner-freed-after-a-decade-in-solitary-confinement-in-pennsylvania/>

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by [Sal Rodriguez](#) | March 8, 2012

Pennsylvania inmate Derrick Stanley has been released from prison after over 22 years of incarceration, more than half of which was served in solitary confinement. Stanley was among six inmates in State Correctional Institution-Dallass Restricted Housing Unit (RHU) charged with rioting after a peaceful protest against mistreatment of another inmate in April 2010. Stanley, who represented himself in court, was granted his habeas corpus petition by the Luzerne County Court of Common Pleas on December 30th, 2011, after a judge dismissed the riot charge against Stanley. According to the [Human Rights Coalition](#), the judge ruled that the circumstances surrounding the riot charge would lead to absurd charges of riot in the future. Stanley maxed out of his underlying criminal conviction for armed robbery on February 7th, and agreed to be interviewed by Solitary Watch.

The riot charge stemmed from an April 29th incident in which Stanley and five other inmates, who collectively would be referred to as the Dallas 6, obstructed their cell door windows in protest of the withholding of food from and violent cell extractions of two other inmates. All six were subject to cell extractions over the course of two-three hours. Stanley was the fifth to be extracted, which was done by approximately half a dozen officers, who tasered and beat him before stripping him naked and keeping him restrained in a hard cell for 24 hours before being transferred to SCI-Mahanoy, where he would spend over a year in solitary confinement.

According to a July 7th, 2010 criminal complaint, prosecutors used the following definition of riot to charge all six: A Person is guilty if he participates with two or more others in a course of disorderly conduct with the intent to coerce official action. To wit; the defendant, along with five other inmates, covered their cell door windows and tied their doors shut in order to cause Corrections Officers to perform cell extractions. (For more specifics on the Dallas 6 case, see my [October 2011](#) article on the issue in addition to the Human Rights Coalition [website](#).)

Stanley's 1989 arrest, which he attributes to a reckless time in his life involving drugs, would be the beginning of over two decades of imprisonment, and over a decade in isolation. After a few years in general population, he had been placed in the Special Management Unit (SMU) in SCI-Camp Hill, beginning a cycle of repeated placement in the hole in facilities across Pennsylvania. His placements, according to him, were typically the result of his consistent willingness to engage in verbal exchanges with the prison guards, whom he saw as abusing their power, particularly in the control units. I wanted the guards to treat me like a human being, instead they treated me wrong; they were antagonistic, he says. According to Pennsylvania DOC policy, inmates may be placed in the RHU for reasons ranging from murder to tattooing, using abusive, obscene, or inappropriate language to or about an employee, and refusing to obey an order. Inmates may be placed in the RH for 90 days per misconduct charge. For Stanley, his write-ups were routinely for his arguments with prison guards and refusal to accept degrading strip searches.

Stanley describes the control unit cells as being the size of a bathroom, approximately 8 x 6, consisting of a desk, toilet and sink, with everything made of concrete. His daily routines would consist of breakfast at 6 am, lunch at 10 am, and dinner between 4 and 5 pm. He would be allowed out of his cell, in shackles, three days a week for showers and yard time Monday through Friday. Yard time consisted of a dog cage approximately the same size as his cell, where he would exercise alone. These would all be subject to restriction, including meals.

Describing his periods in solitary like hell, he says that it made him feel like a piece of fruit and occasionally, psychologically broken. Verbal confrontation with the guards was one means of releasing frustration in reaction to being oppressed. He describes the dynamics between the inmates in the control units and the guards as being one of slave master-slave and describes an atmosphere of repression. They'll do anything possible to keep you subjugated, which is why he would often speak up for other inmates. You depend on [the guards]; they play psychological games; they don't treat us like human beings, he says, we can beat them with intelligence, do or die.

To keep my serenity, I would write, read my Bible, and exercise, he says. He reports access to religious materials, letters, the law library, and visitation would routinely be denied to him and dangled like a carrot in front of him. He tells Solitary Watch that combatting the injustice was a major motivator for him, that while he many times felt broken, he felt obligated to use his energy to confront the problems.

By April 2010, he had been held in the RHU at SCI-Dallas since 2006. He describes the situation at SCI-Dallas as particularly antagonistic. According to his description in a HRC report:

The cell extraction team came with violence and drew my blood splitting my head open over my eye, whereas, I had to get three stitches. Not to even mention how they bruised and injured the left side of my face, and my right knee, etc. . . . Yeah, they threw me in the hard cell naked with nothing [but] a tight restraint belt, barely, allowing me to breathe correctly; my blood could not even circulate properly because of the tight handcuffs and shackles. . . . I had no running water, not even a piece of toilet paper, all I had was a hard cold frame, whereas, I was going through convulsions all night because of the freezing cold. I was without clothes in restraints over 24 hours. Around dinner the next day after the cell extraction I was transferred to SCI Mahanoy. Mahanoy had me in a hard cell for a week until I saw PRC.

The cell extraction, he says, involved 6 to 7 guards, and that the entire process of extracting all six protesters took 2 to 3 hours. The hard cell is a cell without bedding, toilets, sinks, or running water. He would spend a year in solitary confinement at SCI-Mahanoy before being allowed back into general population. It was weird but it was beautifully adapted and adjusted despite the agitation of the guards.

Reflecting on the events, he believes he has PTSD. I'm paranoid now, it's hard for me to trust anyone especially people in law enforcement, including family, he says. I feel like I live in a masquerade party my trust is broken.

Prosecutors are currently appealing the dropped riot charge against him, and Derrick Stanley is ready to go back and fight the charge though he doesn't expect needing to do that. They don't have a case the judge threw it out because it clearly doesn't fit the statutory requirements for a riot, we weren't a mob of people causing problems I don't even worry about it. Stanley is currently pursuing possible legal action in response to what happened to him in April 2010.

In the meantime, he is appreciating freedom, family, interacting with other people, self-reliance and is currently adjusting to a significantly different world than the one he had left, owning his first cell phone and trying to learn the capabilities of the internet.

Asked if there was anything he'd like people to know, Stanley replied, I want them to know this: In life there is a time for everyone to speak up. When it is time, go in with your heart nothing else matters, just do it intelligently. You're going to come out with dignity.

Sal Rodriguez was Solitary Watch's 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 [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

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At Camp Hill, just recently my boyfriend was given nothing to eat for 2 days during medical unit after he was received, except for a small paper bag with 2 pieces of bread, 2 small cups of peanut butter and a few other snacks that are designed to make you void your bowels. Then they are given no toilet paper. He finally got mail, now that he's going to be moved, that I had written to him a month ago. I finally got to visit last week, he has been there since Beginning of February. He won't drink the juice offered at meals because it's been spit into and urinated in. The 7 days in quarantine at Pittsburgh became 12 because of weekends and they don't count the day you are shipped, then 10 days quarantine in Camp Hell turns into 15 for the same reason. Somebody merely being transferred for classification, has at least 27 days with no contact. They say they are allowed to write in Q. How, when you don't get any paper until after you get out of Q? One 3 minute call in almost 30 days. It's hell there, late commissary, no commissary, one phone call every 4 days that inevitably gets cut off or he gets shipped to his call during phone time. He got 15-30 months, all state time, with no previous convictions in this state. No convictions either for ten years. All for 2 pills. Tried to call a counselor, who they say is to help, asked what I could do to help my inmate, only got yelled at for calling. PA needs to be investigated 1st for their court procedures, unrealistic sentencing of people who would be better served in the community, and then for their prison conditions. If it was truly rehabilitative, they would move toward that direction in their policies. It is very much implied in the Commonwealth, that if you complain, they will make life hell inside for your loved one and hard for you to visit or keep in contact.

God Bless you. I hope you find that they are people who care about what has been done to you and others. Thank you for speaking, it had to be hard to tell this story.

HRC and others will be embarking on a campaign to free others from solitary. I will be focusing my attention on Paul Rogers, an

amazing person, caged in solitary in PA 12 years. If people are interested in helping with Paul Rogers campaign, please contact me at lois@realcostofprisons.org. HRC is doing incredibly important work in PA!

I am excited to see some of these people freed but what about those with longer sentences?
Id like to see most returned to general population.

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