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Our Weekly Roundup of New and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | October 15, 2017

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* [reported](#) on a visit to Pennsylvanias prisons by Are Hida, warden of Halden prison in Norway, which is often cited as having the most humane prison system in the world. While Pennsylvania currently holds more than 2,000 people in solitary confinement, Halden has no solitary unit at all. I think you have too much segregation and isolation, Hida said in an interview. That's a big problem in your country: for small things, you're put away for months. In Norway, you'd have maybe eight days in your own cell, he said. Last year, I met an inmate who had been 40 years in isolation, totally alone. That would never happen in Norway.

A trip to visit Norway's prisons has had a profound effect on North Dakota's corrections practices, according to an [article](#) in the *Bismark Times*. Corrections chief Leann Bertsch and other staff toured Norwegian prisons in 2015, and since that time have increased education and work opportunities for incarcerated people, and reduced the use of solitary confinement, which their trip convinced them is largely inhumane and ineffective. The number of individuals in long-term solitary in North Dakota has dropped by close to 80 percent in the last two years, and those remaining in solitary receive more counseling. The warden of the state's largest prison said of solitary: You literally get so used to it you think you can't run a prison without it. Now I would never go back.

The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* [reported](#) that Stewart Detention Center in Southern Georgia neglected to properly observe 27-year-old Jean Jimenez-Joseph, who committed suicide in his isolation cell in May. Jimenez was being held in solitary confinement, had suffered from schizophrenia, and had been considered a suicide risk. According to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) standards, immigrants generic xanax high held in solitary confinement on suicide watch must be observed at least every 30 minutes or, for cases such as Jimenez who had previously attempted suicide, every 15 minutes or more frequently, if necessary. Stewart Detention Center staff violated this regulation twice in the final hours in Jimenez life. The private detention officer assigned to watch Jimenez was fired on June 29, but the Georgia Bureau of Investigation found no foul play in Jimenez suicide.

According to *The Intercept*, a Haitian immigrant detained at Georgia's privately run Stewart Detention Center was [sentenced](#) to 30 days in solitary confinement after shouting no work no pay in the kitchen. ICE records cited the reason for his isolation as encouraging others to participate in a work stoppage. ICE detention standards require all work must be voluntary, as immigrants shall not be required to work, except to do personal housekeeping. Immigrants detained in ICE facilities often receive only \$1 a day for their work, and it is unclear whether the man who shouted in protest received any pay at all.

The Nation [reported](#) on a recent wave of hunger strikes led by immigrants held in private detention facilities that has brought attention to the exploitative work policies in facilities owned by private prison contractors GEO Group and CoreCivic (formerly known as Corrections Corporation of America). In April, about 750 immigrants detained at Washington's Northwest Detention Center refused to eat in protest of the facility's forced labor program, as well as other abusive conditions in the facility. The Project on Government Oversight (POGO) revealed that the work schemes called voluntary are typically enforced by the threat and use of solitary confinement. While forced labor in American prisons cites the Thirteenth Amendment for its legality, Immigration and Customs Enforcement standards have banned forced labor in immigrant detention centers, requiring all work to be voluntary.

Austin, Texas NPR station WKUT [discussed](#) the reality in Texas prisons after the state banned solitary confinement as punishment. The Texas Department of Criminal Justice still makes liberal use of administrative segregation (as opposed to punitive segregation) as a tool that can be used at the staff's discretion to protect staff from inmates and protect inmates from other inmates. Some 4,000 individuals incarcerated in Texas are currently held in solitary confinement, including 200 men on Death Row, who are also automatically placed in isolation upon arrival and remain there until they are executed.

The executive director of the Colorado Department of Corrections, Rick Raemisch, wrote an [op-ed](#) in *The New York Times* advocating for the abolition of long-term solitary confinement in the U.S. prison system, as he deems it both unethical and a public safety issue. Raemisch has ended nearly all use of solitary in Colorado's prisons beyond 14 days, making Colorado the first prison system in the nation to come into compliance with the UN's Mandela Rules for the treatment of incarcerated persons. The piece bookends an [earlier op-ed](#), written in February 2014, in which Raemisch described spending a night in solitary in one of his own maximum security prisons, which strengthened his resolve to pursue reforms of the practice.

Fox 5 Atlanta television news exposed the [case](#) of Ayo Oyakhire, an immigrant from Nigeria held in Atlanta City Detention Center. Oyakhire claimed that a detention center staff member placed him in solitary confinement for 45 days for basically arguing about the television, allegedly bullying and allegedly using slurs. Oyakhire has since been deported, but supporters and advocacy groups appeared at his trial. The Immigration and Customs Enforcement board unanimously acquitted the corrections officer involved.

The premiere episode of National Geographic's new series *The Story of Us*, hosted by Morgan Freeman, features an [interview](#) with Albert Woodfox, thought to have spent more time in solitary confinement than any other living human being. Woodfox, the last member of Louisiana's Angola 3 to be released, left prison in February 2016 after his conviction was overturned. He had lived in solitary confinement for more than 43 years.

Valerie Kiebal was a contributing writer and editorial and project manager for Solitary Watch, and is now the media director of Straight Ahead, which is building a decarceration movement throughout Pennsylvania. Her work has also appeared in *The Root*, *Truthout*, the *Chicago Reporter*, and *Shadowproof*.

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.

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P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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