

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/02/29/new-ban-on-solitary-confinement-for-child-prisoners-in-mississippi/>

Campaign and Advocacy

close

Search

close

close

by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | February 29, 2012

The United States, alone among industrialized nations, incarcerates thousands of juveniles in adult prisons, after trying and sentencing them as adults. We also lead the world in the practice of solitary confinement. These two facts have come together to create a horrifying reality: hundreds of children languishing in isolation cells.

This week, the American Civil Liberties Union and Southern Poverty Law Center announced that after years of litigation, they had reached an agreement with the state of Mississippi that will end juvenile solitary confinement in its prisons. According to a post on the [ACLU's Blog of Rights](#):

On March 22, 2012, a federal court in Jackson, Mississippi, will enter [a groundbreaking consent decree](#), believed to be the first of its kind in the nation, banning the horrendous practice of subjecting kids convicted as adults to solitary confinement. While in solitary, the youth are held in almost complete isolation and sensory deprivation with virtually no human contact, without books, paper or pens, radios, pictures, access to television or any kind of recreational activity, and are denied all visits, telephone calls and even mail from their families. If prison staff tags a kid as suicidal which they often do with punitive motives that kid is stripped naked except for a paper gown and denied a mattress.

It's been known for a long time that [prolonged solitary confinement](#) inflicts intense suffering, worsens pre-existing mental illness and causes psychiatric breakdown even in mature healthy adults left alone in emotionally vulnerable kids. International law recognizes that solitary confinement can rise to torture and, furthermore, that kids under the age of 18 are particularly vulnerable to the damaging effects of solitary. These effects are so well understood that international law now prohibits solitary confinement of any person under the age of 18, strongly condemning it as a form of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

According to the [Jackson Clarion Ledger](#), the group's lawsuit, filed in November 2010, challenged what it called brutal, unconstitutional conditions at Mississippi's Walnut Grove Youth Correctional Facility. WGYCF, which houses male prisoners ages 13 to 22, is operated by the GEO Group, America's second largest private prison company. In addition to placing kids in solitary confinement, the suit alleges that guards beat inmates, smuggled drugs to the youths and engaged in sexual acts with them, as well as allowing older inmates to prey on younger ones. In an incident two years ago, 14 young inmates were injured, including one who suffered brain damage. The consent decree announced this week will also ban the placement of juveniles at WGYCF.

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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Congratulations.

Hates abortion, loves mass incarceration and isolation. America loves the kids! It just has a skewed, distorted, and perverted way of showing it.

Reblogged this on pastproduction.

Best news of the year! Congratulations to the ACLU and the Southern Law Office. God Bless Mississippi. Thank you to Solitary Watch for keeping us informed of the news in solitary across the nation.

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