

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/01/13/mumia-abu-jamal-moved-off-death-row-and-into-solitary-confinement/>

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | January 13, 2012

According to his attorneys and advocates, Mumia Abu-Jamal has been moved from Pennsylvania's Death Row to a solitary confinement cell at the State Correctional Institute at Mahanoy, in rural Frackville. After 30 years on death row, his [death sentence was overturned](#) by the federal courts.

A [statement](#) and call to action being circulated by [Prison Radio](#) and the [Human Rights Coalition](#) describes Mumia's conditions. It also notes that he hopes to use his status as perhaps the nation's best-known prisoner to draw attention to the plight of the tens of thousands of other inmates being held in solitary confinement.

Mumia is being kept in solitary in SCI Mahanoy's dungeon. Its restrictions and conditions belie its modern construction. Mumia just told us on Friday that he wants all of his supporters to broaden this call, to not just focus on his case, but to understand that all torture units must be shut down.

Mumia Abu-Jamal is being held in extremely repressive conditions. And like thousands of prisoners, residents of solitary confinement and isolation units in every hole in every prison across the country, Mumia is being subject to draconian, dehumanizing and brutal conditions. Solitary confinement. He is shackled whenever he is outside his cell, even to the shower. He is shackled around his ankles, waist and wrist. He is shackled while behind Plexiglas during visits. Subject to strip searches before and after visits. Unable to walk freely. Having bits of paper to write notes on, with a rubber flex pen. No shelves, 4 books. No access to news reports, letters delayed. Restricted visiting. Glaring lights on 24 hours a day. Only one brief phone call to his wife. No access to adequate food or commissary. These conditions are worse than death row.

Attorney Rachel Wolkenstein argues that there is no legal basis for Mumia to be confined in AC. At the point he was no longer under a death sentence, he should have been transferred into general population. This is not dependent on a court date for Mumia to be formally resentenced to life imprisonment. In response to her inquiries, the Department of Corrections said that Mumia is in AC pending resentencing and further evaluations. But Wolkenstein points out that the District Attorney has stated there will be no trial to obtain a new death sentence, nor is there a reason or basis for further evaluation. Mumia has been confined in Pennsylvania prisons for some thirty years. The DOC unquestionably knows his history, conduct and behavior. There is nothing in Mumia's personal record to justify holding him in Administrative Custody.

Conditions for the 2,500 other inmates currently in solitary confinement in Pennsylvania's Restricted Housing Units has been well documented in reports from the Human Rights Coalition; they can be read [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

Update: Attorney Rachel Wolkenstein reported last night: Mumia informed me tonight in a legal phone call that today he was given a new, additional reason for being held in AC status his long dreadlocks. For over eight years Mumia had been held in disciplinary custody on death row for no stated reason except his hair. DC [disciplinary custody] is yet one step below AC in the prisons torture blocks. No books at all, no outside communication. No commissary. It has taken over five weeks for the DOC to come up with this.

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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This man is a danger to the whole population if allowed among the general population of prison to convert and build his philosophical terror group. What are we saying? He's been given life instead of death when he deserved death so how can he be mistreated. Obviously all the handcuffing is done because he is a danger to anyone having to do with him. You who want him to have such fair treatment take him into your home.

Mumia abu-Jamal is a prisoner of conscience; what I mean by saying this is: He has moved from one form of cruel and unusual punishment to another form of cruel and unusual punishment in a sense. He cannot be allowed to be in the general population because of popularity. On the other hand, he cannot be allowed to be within the general population because of security for himself, the staff, and other inmates. His popularity could be the cause of his demise.

Yes, it is really very bad when one is suppressed, oppressed, and depressed within this manner, but sometimes it really cannot be helped. We as a society would be upset, and rightly so, if another inmate wanted to be the big man on campus, by bringing his demise to fruition. Cruel as it may be, it is better that he stays in solitary for now, than to be among other people.

Later on, they may find another way to get him out of solitary, and keep him safe. He is overly popular, which also makes him a political prisoner. Because, in between both of these hands, political prisoners are like sociologists; they are both social and political, and they are also like anthropologists, because they too are both social and political. If Abu-Jamal was in the outside world, there would be a lot of countries they would never allow him to enter based on his education and the type of knowledge he carries. I personally know this to be fact.

For all of us, let's keep him in our hearts, prayers, and thoughts. At the same time let's also not forget Mr. Davis who paid with his life for a crime that he did not do. All of it had to do with politics.

There must be some way to get these stories of such brutality and abuse out. It is so urgent that a wider audience be made aware of these horrors. Is there coordination with organizations like Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the Center for Constitutional Rights?

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