

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2011/02/06/prison-myth-no-1-prisoners-want-to-go-into-solitary-confinement/>

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by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#) | February 6, 2011

Editors note: Stan Moody is a former state representative and chaplain at the Maine State Prison, where he ministered to inmates in the supermax unit. Moody, who currently serves as pastor at the Meeting House Church in Manchester, Maine, is the author of the books Crisis in Evangelical Scholarship and McChurched: 300 Million Served and Still Hungry. Last year, Moody testified at a hearing in the Maine State Legislature on a proposed bill to limit solitary confinement in the states prisons. More of Moodys writings can be found at www.stanmoody.com.

It is not news that public opinion is stacked against those who have been convicted and incarcerated for a crime any crime. Check the Internet blogs on notorious cases in Maine, and you will see a marked trend toward Lock him up and throw away the key. Never do you read, There but for the grace of God go I.

Prisons are, very simply, designed to keep the presumed incorrigible out of contact with the public in the interest of protecting both. In a world of law and order politicians and self-righteous citizens, the reality is one of spiraling costs and the expectation that when they come out they will be worse than when they went in

Prisons have become very efficient campuses for handling convicts. More than half the US prisons in use today have been built over the last 25 years. These facilities were designed to process people in and out of highly controlled work, cafeteria and recreational environments with an absolute minimum of management skill or ingenuity. They are sterile, military-type environments that require little of staff, expect little of inmates beyond obedience and demoralize both

There are several myths as to why things dont change in the prison culture in Maine, none of which has much merit. The first one I want to address is the myth that insists that solitary confinement is OK because inmates like it. You will hear that myth being propagated by corrections officials and legislators who, ironically, themselves go into spasms of depression when faced with any kind of isolation. Take the attention away from a politician, and he or she will inevitably do something outrageous to get it back

Solitary confinement is as close to a 19th century Charles Dickens novel as you can get. Maine State Prison was built only 34 years after the Quakers built the nations first prison, the Walnut Street Jail in Philadelphia, in 1790. In 1829, the Quakers and the Anglicans expanded on the Walnut Street experiment and built the Eastern State Penitentiary, like Walnut Street a solitary confinement prison operating under the theory that isolation and solitude inspire repentance. Eastern State closed in 1971 as a failed prison model.

In 1842, Charles Dickens himself visited the Eastern State Penitentiary. He later wrote, I believe it to be cruel and wrong. I hold this daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain to be immeasurably worse than any torture of the body.

Eventually, high tech, maximum security prisons like the one in Warren, Maine, became the option of choice for politicians and correction officials needing to keep inmates off the front page of the newspapers and under control. They were the modern means of satisfying the three-monkey defense see no evil; hear no evil; speak no evil. The public could now rest in its pride of a modern facility and in its desire for ignorance of its inner workings. Surrounded by 1,100 acres of farmland, Maine State Prison is off anybodys radar

On my first trip as a Chaplain through the Special Management Unit (SMU), the modern term for solitary confinement, I was surprised to find inmates like Cal, Nick, Art, Troy, Mike, Ron, Dan, Jesse and many, many others who were working on breaking the record for the most months in solitary. One of them reached 20 months, as I recall. Somebody in management failed to get the message from the 1960s that isolation tended to make people crazy not better.

It is very common when an inmate is within months of being released to let him serve out his last stretch in solitary and then release him to the streets. One classic case was Jonathan Dix, a severely depressed black inmate who went from months in SMU to Lewiston and was dead of an overdose within 2 weeks. I pleaded with Jonathan to head straight to his family in Brockton, MA, several of whom would have come to the prison to pick him up.

What I saw in SMU were broken people who had lost all sense of dignity and self-respect, which led them to act out and earn more high risk time in solitary. In January, 1998, CNN Correspondent Peg Tyre quoted David Levin of Prisoners Legal Services, who called

excessive solitary confinement death by incarceration. She interviewed psychiatrist Dr. Henry Weinstein (unrelated to inmate Sheldon Weinstein who bled out from an unattended ruptured spleen in Maine's SMU on April 24, 2009). Dr. Weinstein described the symptoms of prisoners in solitary as ranging from memory loss to severe anxiety to hallucinations to delusions and, under the severest cases of sensory deprivation, people go crazy.

Are there some prisoners who find solitary appealing at some level? Believe it or not, it can get quite chaotic in general population at times, and there are some who find solitary useful for getting their heads straight. That may work for 1-2 weeks, but 20 months? What you are in danger of producing in 20 months is a person who has nothing to lose, a situation that raises substantially the threat to corrections officers.

Anyone working in corrections or involved in criminal legislation who justifies a 19th Century penal system on the grounds that Prisoners want to go into solitary confinement is grossly out of touch with human nature and has, by that statement, disqualified himself. The myth that prisoners like solitary confinement inspires back room brutality, encourages laziness and greases the revolving door: Hell be back!



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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Having served 5yrs, as a sex offender, it has saved my life. I agree that the majority wouldn't want solitary, but it does serve a purpose.

ok lets get this right if you think they like solitary so much why not try it your self see how you feel after a year in SHU if by then you still can feel that is biggest lie ever have they no sense up there Maine just say no to solitary it does no good may there be light in the darkness of justice

When writing on Prison and the Character of Nations (1) I haven't seen RELATED VIDEOS confirming the United States of America Humanity executed. Incarceration Nation distributes its very understanding of democracy and dignity of man to other nations losing by that their voice while Tunisia's interim government should ease overcrowding and reverse a policy imposed more than 15 years ago to deny inmates facing the death penalty any contact with their families, Human Rights Watch said today followed by Egypt and. . . As in other nations progress can be expected only from the citizen possibly guided by spiritual and moral leaders. Stan Moody, James Ridgeway for example including.

(1) <http://www.manipulatedtrial.de/FK%20Prison%20and%20the%20Character%20of%20Nations%200108.pdf>

Pastor Stan Moody is a gift of Christ to His Body we are praying for the funds to send his books directly to our Wounded Warriors Incarcerated in federal and state prisons; members of the first ever educational in prison studies Power Point Presentations teaching our beloved Community business ownership studies. They can return the small business world to our country so needed please pray with us as we seek legislation, federal and state all Military Veterans vis non-violent offenses; go through the Veteran Courts we are seeking in every city in the country; those who have Service-Connected Disability prior to their offense will spend their time in Veteran Villages where they will learn business ownership studies.

If you have any Military Veterans who had such combat disability prior to incarceration, please share.

The War Widows

Mary Murphy, former VA and Prison Chaplain/Marshal Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals

MY SONS PSYCHIATRIST AT THE PRISON HAS TOLD ME SEVERAL TIMES THAT MY SON, AS WELL AS THE OTHER PATIENTS/INMATES, FEEL BETTER BEING IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT. THIS IS A LIE. THE DOCTORS FEEL BETTER, NOT THE PATIENTS.

GOD HELP US! HOW CAN AN ENTIRE COUNTRY BE SO STUPID! WHERE IS OUR COMPASSION, UNDERSTANDING AND JUST PLAIN COMMON SENSE? MY SON HAD A CHANCE AT BECOMING A PRODUCTIVE HUMAN BEING, LEARNING TO DEAL WITH HIS MENTAL ILLNESS, FIGHT HIS

VOICES AND THEN, BECAUSE OF PREVIOUS VIOLENCE NEARLY TWO YEARS BEFORE, HAS BEEN SENT TO A PRISON, TAKEN OUT OF THE MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM, ALTHOUGH NEVER CONVICTED OF A CRIME, AND PLACED INTO THE CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM. GETTING HIM BACK INTO THE MH SYSTEM, AS I AM FINDING OUT, IS VERY COMPLEX AND THE GOVERNMENT HAS MADE SURE IT IS SLOW AND DIFFICULT. ITS ALL ABOUT CUSTODY AS HIS COUNSELOR TELLS ME. PRAY FOR ZEKE; I HAVE TO GET HIM OUT OF THERE.

For more of my writings on prison reform, please see <http://www.scribd.com/stanmoody> and <http://www.moodyreport.wordpress.com>

Through the good work of Solitary Watch and a myriad of other activists, and by the mercy of the current economic downturn that has directed the spotlight on the foolishness of governments processing of our misfits, prison reform is, as one activist stated, in the air.

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