

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2015/06/29/kalief-browders-life-and-death-galvanize-action-to-end-solitary-confinement/>

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by [Hallie Grossman](#) | June 29, 2015

Three weeks ago, a young African American man from the Bronx [took his own life](#). The impact of Kalief Browders suicide has been felt at the city, state, and even federal levels, and may be felt far into the future.

Browders story, in which he was held on Rikers Island for three years beginning at the age of 16, spent an accumulated two of those years in solitary confinement, and was ultimately released without a trial or charges, became news last fall, when Jennifer Gonnerman published a [profile](#) of him in the *New Yorker*. Prior to his death, he attracted celebrity attention from the likes of Jay-Z and Rosie O'Donnell, and the attention was used to garner support around issues ranging from bail reform to banning youth from solitary to raising the age at which juveniles may be imprisoned and tried as adults. His death has been a galvanizing force and has spurred even more attention and action.

Within a week of Kalief Browders death, the New York State Assembly [passed a bill](#) introduced by Assembly Member Daniel O'Donnell that would ban solitary confinement for all individuals below the age of 21 and all individuals with a mental illness or a developmental disability. This is a bill that could prevent future cases like Browders from ending in tragedy. It is a bill that could eventually alter the course of the solitary confinement of youth across the country.

Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, who has found ways to bring up solitary confinement issues [in the past](#), cited Browders story in a [concurring opinion](#) this week. The case, *Davis v. Ayala*, was focused on jury selection and the death penalty, but Kennedy introduced the intersectional issue of solitary confinement into the discussion. His critique was based on research and referred to the terrible price exacted by prolonged isolation.

Closer to home, a Union Square vigil on June 16, organized by the Jails Action Coalition (JAC), gave voice to powerful words from various individuals affected by solitary confinement directly and indirectly. Johnny Perez, a JAC member and survivor of solitary confinement, said, I'm scared of becoming a hashtag on a t-shirt. This is a sentiment that has been echoed by many young people of color in a culture that profiles and often wounds or kills them. At this point, [#KaliefBrowder](#) has appeared on Twitter thousands of times, and a Google search of his name yields over 600,000 results.

Outside of social media, news media outlets have published dozens of pieces on Kalief Browder in a variety of different contexts. The *New York Times* published an [editorial](#) on Browder and the quest to ameliorate the culture of violence fostered on Rikers Island. Ian Kysel wrote an [op-ed piece](#) for *Washington Post* outlining the irreversible harm done to youth in solitary. Browder may have fallen victim to the hashtag, but his legacy could prove to be one that changes laws or, at least, attitudes toward solitary confinement.

Browders lawyer Paul Prestia spoke at the vigil, saying, If we have to stand here again a year from now or six months from now, what's the point? Browders death may have helped O'Donnell push the new bill through the Assembly, and Kennedys concurrence could invite cases regarding solitary confinement to be considered by the Supreme Court. The question is whether or not his story will remain in peoples hearts and minds when the Assembly reconvenes in January, or when the next Supreme Court case that has room to set a solitary confinement precedent occurs, which could be years from now.

The solitary confinement narrative refers to the widely held opinions or misconceptions regarding the practice, which are created and perpetuated by media outlets, government officials, and the public. Browders death is tragic because he was so young, because this could have been avoided, because this system has loopholes, because he was simply human the list goes on. Changing the narrative through legislative as well as grassroots action is important in its potential for increased resistance in the public and private spheres.

Though Browder was dedicated to bringing about change, he did not die for the attention. He died because he was in serious pain, because the punishment for living inside a body that is constantly profiled has shown, time and time again, to be death. He died because there was no escaping solitary confinement and what it took from him as a teenager. He died because the prison system forgot about him once he entered the box. His death exists not in a vacuum, but in the context of a movement. The movement owes it to him not only to mourn, but also to take action.

Hallie Grossman was a research and reporting intern for Solitary Watch and now works in communications at DKC in New York.

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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. We dont need reform. we need TRANSFORM. This is saying well decrease the amount of torture

how about no more torture? Solitary is only torture the way they do it. THAT is what needs to change.

MY remedy will transform the whole system.

Remedy for Rikers

<http://www.1prophetspeaks7.blogspot.com/2015/06/remedy-for-rikers.html>

Faith based programs are the only ones that really transform people. God through Jesus changes people. Hence we need to change the prisons into schools of ministry.

Give EVERY person in solitary a bible, guitar and kitten
Bibles should be a constitutional right in every jail cell everywhere, like a toilet.

Guitars are tools to help them learn to worship God which invokes HIs spirit so they can hear from Him. Kittens would help them maintain their humanity. Many prisoners use cockroaches or rats as pets.

I spent 8 months in solitary. It was torture because I did not have a bible or instrument.

I was already a strong believer an intercessor and lifelong musician. Everyone in jails hears voices. I knew they were God and demons The task was to decide who was who. MOST prisoners think they are hallucinating when they hear voices. And the atheist psych people who talk to them tell them this too. THEN they think they need psych drugs for the alleged hallucinations. They get all distressed cos they cant get the drugs, when the drugs is NOT what they need. They turn people into vegetables. They block all thoughts, not just bad thoughts They cause brain damage I was on them so I know. They HINDER prayer. They are not what people need .People need to be TOLD they are NOT hallucinating that God is there for them and to develop a relationship with HIM by reading a bible and playing music.

I have masters in jazz composition In music school people go into small rooms the size of cells, often, with their instrument, It is not hell like jail it is more like heaven. Hence we can turn solitary into an experience that a person should have had before they ended up in jail. A chance to be in music school. This is a blessing. They will come out of

there trained to be a minister to others in jails, in schools, warning kids not to use drugs, join gangs, etc and ministers.

The other important issue is to erase criminal records. THEY are what ruin peoples lives because what is written down acts like curses and sends assignments to a person where they get re-accused in all kinds of bizarre situations and ruins their lives. And it also tempts people to re-do sins and criminal behaviors.

Prison should be a time out Solitary does not have to be torture. though it should be used in a way where people have their own cell and come out for communal meals, to compare notes about prayer.

Psych drugs destroy people. They are the problem, not the solution. They cause suicide and homicide. The Governors need to give people an amnesty by executive orders overriding their previous sentence.

Regardless of the previous sentence, it could be that they need to spend no more than a year or two training for ministry reading the bible, learning how to pray.

Their job can include writing a memoir of what happened to them so others can understand it and learn from it. Especially for people on death row.

People make mistakes in life. It is part of life .To punish people for this makes no sense. We should be interested in transforming them and using their previous experience as part of their testimony to what Jesus has healed them from and to warn others about not doing.

The worst criminals have the most powerfull testimonies. So their mistakes are not wasted. They are valuable testimonies to others of the transformative power of God/Jesus. Someone who was a mass murderer has a more impressive testimony than someone who stole gum.

The jail sentence should be seen as a time out for assessment of a persons attitude and behavior and training to change it.

One thing that would be effective would be part of their sentence would be to have the person write 50,000 times Drugs are a bad idea if they used drugs, for example. Doing this will re-program their brain NOT to want to do drugs! Or whatever they did before. Like when kids have to write on the blackboard.

We should use school as a model for what happens in jails. Life is School. Re training rather than punishment should be the objective.

Turning someone from an animal into a caring human being is a more inspiring testimony than just executing people or punishing them.

Those who are unwilling to forgive need to be warned it can send a person to hell. That is what solitary is like as a warning that hell is real. Every person near me had been horribly abused and needed to forgive. They were there as a warning to do so or go to hell, which is what jail was a taste of.

jesus said unless we forgive others, God wont forgive us. Matthew 6

Hell is real. Jails, solitary, psych wards, holocausts and wars all exist as a taste of it on earth, so we WILL believe there IS such a real place. That is their purpose.

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doesn't need to be for 20 years.
Experiencing it for a week is enough to get the message.

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He has been saved 25 years. Gov Cuomo should pardon him and ask him to
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He should RUN for office because the PUBLIC needs to hear about the
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None of detainee suicides are reported to the public and if theyre not killing themselves, theyre killing someone else, this mental abuse is
common practice by the evil ones that take oaths. Unconvicted detainees are treated worse than convicted prisoners, forced to strip naked
and expose themselves every time they go to court! (No one remembers Rhem v Malcolm, 371 F2nd 594)! They know what causes a
dangerous state of instability and call it job security! When is America going to wake up to the Governments own human trafficking, a
multi billion dollar industry involving illegal laborers, fraudulent wars, the highest consumption of narcotics in the world, and the highest
incarceration rate in the world while laughing at public safety! This is why the rest of the world hates Americans, its the character of a
Nation, treacherous pirates from the beginning.

I think even Satan is startled by the depths of human cruelty.

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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