

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2010/12/13/georgia-prisoners-strike-we-locked-ourselves-down/>

Campaign and Advocacy

close

Search

close

close

by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | December 13, 2010

In a protest that appears to be spreading through Georgia's prison system, inmates are striking for better conditions. One interesting facet of this rare prison strike, which reaches across multiple facilities and across racial and factional lines, is the participants' use of self-imposed lockdown to serve their own goals.

Lockdown, in which prisoners are confined to their cells for up to 24 hours a day, is routinely imposed on inmates for punishment or as a security measure. In this case, however, prisoners are refusing to leave their cells until their demands are taken seriously. The Georgia Corrections Department's only response so far, ironically, has been to place the affected prisons on lockdown. As the [New York Times](#) reported:

Were not coming out until something is done. Were not going to work until something is done, said one inmate at Rogers State Prison in Reidsville. He refused to give his name because he was speaking on a banned cellphone

The Corrections Department placed several of the facilities where inmates planned to strike under indefinite lockdown on Thursday, according to local reports.

Were hearing in the news they're putting it down as we're starting a riot, so they locked all the prison down, said a 20-year-old inmate at Hays State Prison in Trion, who also refused to give his name. But, he said, We locked ourselves down.

The best roundup we've found of information and context on the strike appears today on [Prison Law Blog](#). (We are taking the liberty of running the post in full, but please visit and subscribe to the blog, which is well worth your attention.)

The Black Agenda Report, a Georgia-based news site from the black left, reported on Saturday that inmates [were on Day 2 of a strike](#) ([mirrored here at Open Left](#)):

Inmate families and other sources claim that when thousands of prisoners remained in their cells Thursday, authorities responded with violence and intimidation. Tactical officers rampaged through Telfair State Prison destroying inmate personal effects and severely beating at least six prisoners. Inmates in Macon State Prison say authorities cut the prisoners' hot water, and at Telfair the administration shut off heat Thursday when daytime temperatures were in the 30s. Prisoners responded by screening their cells with blankets, keeping prison authorities from performing an accurate count, a crucial aspect of prison operations.

Although there were some reports of a media blackout, the *New York Times* did report on the strike, [here](#) (online only) and [here](#) (online and page A13 of yesterday's newspaper) (and [picked up by Slate here](#)), emphasizing the use of cell phones and social networking to coordinate the strike. However, most local news outlets reported, via the Georgia Department of Corrections, that the prisoners were not on strike, but rather had been placed on lockdown to pre-empt the strike. Examples of local Georgia coverage portraying the weekend's events as a lockdown are [here at the Rome News-Tribune](#), [here from the AP](#), [here from Atlanta's WSB-TV](#), and [here from Georgia Public Broadcasting](#).

With about 52,000 inmates, Georgia's prison system is not among the largest in the country in absolute numbers. But relative to the state's population, it has an outsized reach. In Georgia, 1 in 13 adults is either in prison, in jail, on probation, or on parole [the highest rate of correctional control in the country](#). (Nationwide that figure is 1 in 31.) According to [the Sentencing Project](#), over 4% of Georgia adults and almost 10% of African-Americans cannot vote due to felony disenfranchisement laws. The Atlanta-based Southern Center for Human Rights has been a leading advocate [for prisoners in Georgia](#) and its neighboring states.

A few more links and the prisoners' complete list of demands after the jump.

And the full list of the prisoners' demands, from the above-linked press release:

A LIVING WAGE FOR WORK: In violation of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution prohibiting slavery and involuntary servitude, the DOC demands prisoners work for free.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES: For the great majority of prisoners, the DOC denies all opportunities for education beyond the GED, despite the benefit to both prisoners and society.

DECENT HEALTH CARE: In violation of the 8th Amendment prohibition against cruel and unusual punishments, the DOC denies adequate medical care to prisoners, charges excessive fees for the most minimal care and is responsible for extraordinary pain and suffering.

AN END TO CRUEL AND UNUSUAL PUNISHMENTS: In further violation of the 8th Amendment, the DOC is responsible for cruel prisoner punishments for minor infractions of rules.

DECENT LIVING CONDITIONS: Georgia prisoners are confined in over-crowded, substandard conditions, with little heat in winter and oppressive heat in summer.

NUTRITIONAL MEALS: Vegetables and fruit are in short supply in DOC facilities while starches and fatty foods are plentiful.

VOCATIONAL AND SELF-IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES: The DOC has stripped its facilities of all opportunities for skills training, self-improvement and proper exercise.

ACCESS TO FAMILIES: The DOC has disconnected thousands of prisoners from their families by imposing excessive telephone charges and innumerable barriers to visitation.

JUST PAROLE DECISIONS: The Parole Board capriciously and regularly denies parole to the majority of prisoners despite evidence of eligibility.



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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After reading this article I stumbled upon another one from 2004 which made this one more relative.

Excerpts below:

<http://bostonreview.net/BR29.5/dayan.php>

The ghost of slavery is built into our legal language and holds our prison system in its grip.

To the extent that slaves were allowed personalities before the law, they were regarded chiefly almost solely as potential criminals.

The 13th Amendment to the Constitution abolished slavery except as punishment of crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted.

Those who were once slaves were now criminals, and forced labor in the form of the convict lease system ensured continued degradation. The locale for enslavement moved from the auction block to the courts of the United States.

In *Ruffin v. Commonwealth* (1871) Justice Christian decided, The Bill of Rights is a declaration of general principles to govern a society

of freemen, and not of convicted felons and men civilly dead. They are the slaves of the State undergoing punishment for heinous crimes committed against the laws of the land.

The creation of a new class of civil slaves has enabled a mobile, endlessly adaptable strategy of domination and control.

Through an often ingenious technical legalism, the court has paved the way for cruelty that passes for the necessary incidents of prison life. Conditions such as indefinite solitary confinement are unconstitutional only when they pose a substantial risk of serious harm. The legal decimation of personhood that began with slavery has been perfected in the logic of the courtroom and adjusted to prisoners. This reasoning so long ignored, except by corrections officials who learned how to manipulate legal language was carefully studied by the White House lawyers.

Whether the Eighth Amendment has been violated or not does not depend on the cruel and inhumane treatment of prisoners: it depends on the motivation or intention of prison officials. All claims about unacceptable prison conditions must show deliberate indifference to the conditions of prisoners refusing to recognize overall conditions of confinement, focusing instead on the actual, physical, and specific deprivation of a single human need.

Verbal qualifiers gut the substance of suffering in favor of increasingly rarified rituals of definition. The imprecision of such terms not only neutralize the obvious but trivialize abuse.

We are a nation of laws. Laws that permit indefinite solitary confinement in state-of-the-art, high-tech units, with cell doors, unit doors, and shower doors operated remotely from a control center. Physical contact is limited to being touched through a security door by a correctional officer while being placed in restraints or having restraints removed. Inmates have described life in the massive, windowless supermax as akin to living in a tomb, circling in space, or being freeze-dried.

When does an emotional scar become visible? To make it visible is to stigmatize, yet only certain kinds of stigmatization are recognized: those that accord with the substandard of what prisoners are assumed to be. They are all bodies. Only some are granted minds. And who is to decide? The unspoken assumption remains: prisoners are not persons. Or, at best, they are a different kind of human: so dehumanized that the Eighth Amendment no longer applies.

In a penal system that has become instrumental in managing the dispossessed, the unfit, and the dishonored, such phrases as minimal civilized measure of life's necessities or the basic necessities of human life prompt us to reconsider the meaning of human.

Thanks for this report Solitary Watch.

it really is time some told them what for i mean GA state has ben a bad prison state for years i see they dmands of the inmates to be fare and right after all what is a coreshnel if it dose not coret i am honnored to see this grate fight of sides like days of old a sit in but in this case it is a cell in and i all for it i have never seen the use of a form of solitary used for this perpes not in the shu or by everyone this shows a strong prison a good change to to win to i all ways said if the inmates stoped fighting each other and worked as one to take over and stand as one hole in this case they could ealy take the prison over and or stop the vary prison from runing in this case suporters should camp out side the prison you know hold a sit in why they hold a cell in and good lucky to them brave inmates may thare be light in the darknes of justice

WOOT way to go you tell the docs whats for and tell them to get thare head out thare asses bout time we had a nuther adica state well done on thare part thow it makes the inmates look wise and they are in takeing the rout they have fight on may thare be light in the darknes of justice

we must identify those Wounded Warriors Incarcerated who had their Service-Connected Disability prior to their offense and the VA offers no health care.

Please they can change the federal and state prisons from within.

The War Widows

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