

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [Aviva Stahl](#) | September 21, 2014



The following roundup features noteworthy news, reports and opinions on solitary confinement from the past week that have not been covered in other Solitary Watch posts.

AP reporter Adam Geller [published an investigation](#) into why so many individuals with mental illness are held in solitary confinement in local jails across the country. He notes, There has been little attention to the use of isolation in the countrys 3,300 local jails, increasingly the biggest mental health treatment centers in many communities.

The National Coalition to Protect Civil Freedoms held an event that explored the human rights abuses endured by terrorism suspects since 9/11, including the use of solitary confinement. Affected family members told their stories. A [local community radio station](#) covered the event.

[The Journal Star](#) (Lincoln, NE) published an editorial criticizing the states overuse of solitary confinement and calling for reform.

The [BBC](#) published an hour-long documentary about the efforts of the Maine State Prison to reduce the use of solitary confinement. (Video not available in the United States.)

Floridas Department of Corrections [has fired 32 individuals](#) accused of misconduct or illegal activity, including the officers recently sued for the death of incarcerated 27-year-old Randall Jordan-Aparo. He was serving an 18-month sentence when he was found dead in solitary confinement, allegedly as a result of being gassed multiple times with noxious chemicals.

Mother Jones writer and solitary confinement survivor Shane Bauer [published a critique](#) of a recently released *Atlantic* article entitled [How Gangs Took Over Prisons](#). Bauer is especially critical of the language used in the article to describe Pelican Bays Secure Housing Unit, which holds men in extended solitary confinement, sometimes for decades.

George Lavender of *In These Times* [published an interview](#) with George Kendall Director of the Public Defender Initiative, who is representing Robert King and Albert Woodfox of the Angola 3 in their lawsuit against Louisiana prison officials. Woodfox has been in solitary confinement for over four decades; King spent 29 years in isolation before being released from prison in 2001.

Matthew Hale, a 43-year-old self-proclaimed white supremacist incarcerated at the federal supermax in Florence, Colorado, has [offered to drop his \\$19 million lawsuit](#) against prison officials if he is permitted to play his violin in his cell. He was quoted as saying, Its really the kind of hubris, stupidity, and downright sadism that one should expect from the federal government I suspect the defendants could not bear the thought of my actually enjoying myself by my being able to play my beloved violin in my prison cell.

Two Ohio law firms have [filed suits alleging inhumane conditions](#) at the Multi-County Juvenile Detention Center, on behalf of three individuals formerly incarcerated there. According to the lawsuit, young people at the jail were placed in solitary confinement for to up forty days, in cells with temperatures in the mid-50s.

Aviva Stahl is a Brooklyn-based reporter who writes about science/health at the intersection of mass incarceration, national security, and trans rights. Shes written for the New York Times, Wired, BuzzFeed News, Solitary Watch, and other outlets. Find her @stahlidarity and at stahlidarity.com.

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 [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 26, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

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Even the AG agrees with me.

Crime Falls As U.S. Locks Up Fewer People, Attorney General Holder Says

by BILL CHAPPELL

September 23, 2014 5:38 PM ET

In his speech, Holder said that earlier attempts to get tough on criminals had been responsible for the growth in Americas prison population and that those policies had also perpetuated a destructive cycle of poverty, criminality and incarceration that has trapped countless people and weakened entire communities particularly communities of color.

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2014/09/23/350928825/crime-falls-as-u-s-locks-up-fewer-people-attorney-general-holder-says>

I cant fathom the fact that the same mag that published Ta-Nehesi Coates article on Reparations also published that garbage about Pelican Bay. Woods article was a very lazy piece of journalism. The back story as to why it is so unbalanced would be interesting to hear.

Thank you, Shane Bauer!

In The Atlantic article titled How Gangs Took Over Prisons. Mr. Wood wrote without explaining how:

In 2013, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation confiscated 12,151 phones. A reasonable guess might be that this represented a tenth of all cellphones in the system, which means that almost every one of the states 135,600 inmates had a phone all in violation of prison regulations.

But I ask how did those cell phones get into the hands of prison gangs in the first place when, as Wood writes in the opening paragraph;

The only way to control known gang members is to confine them under strict conditions that make communication almost, but not quite, impossible no freedom of movement or circulation with the general prison population, for example, and ONLY RARE, CAREFULLY MONITORED VISITS. ?

My belief is that incarceration is a cruel gauntlet with one side lined with rouge guards and the other with predatory inmates. These natural adversaries, both consciously and unconsciously, collude in order to mete out societies punishment.

Or, as one Mother Jones commentator on Shane Bauer critique has wrote;

Gangs do exist and they are a primary mechanism the prison administration uses to control the population, keep them divided along racial/ethnic lines to sustain their monstrous punitive system.

And even the subtitle acknowledges that reality: Originally formed for self-protection, prison gangs have become the unlikely custodians of order behind bars and of crime on the streets.

And Wood goes on to write: Prisoners banded together for self-protection and later, for profit. The result was the first California prison gang.

As I have noted on here before beginning in 1970 as result of legal maneuvers by congress inmates found themselves facing longer, harsher sentences. Lengthy or Life sentences without parole became all too common and for such lifers, mere survival is not enough, they want to prosper and help their families on the outside. After all, a life sentence without parole means prison is their new home. And in prison, drugs, gambling, and sex are the biggest money makers. To control these avenues of profit in a concentrated environment of violent men, prison gangs have used excessive violence thus creating a sort of arms race between them.

Give more inmates the hope of being released one day, and the tools to succeed on the outside, then and only then will they be motivated to change.

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