

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2013/11/22/federal-bureau-prisons-details-limited-audit-solitary-confinement-practices/>

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | November 22, 2013

Last week, representatives of six nonprofit organizations critical of solitary confinement met in a closed-door meeting in Washington, D.C., with the team hired to conduct an [internal audit](#) of the federal Bureau of Prisons controversial segregation policies.

The idea for an audit came out of Senator Dick Durbin's June 2012 Senate hearing on solitary confinement, where BOP director Charles Samuels was grilled on the federal prison systems use of solitary, especially on prisoners with mental illness. Further criticism emerged from [media coverage](#), [lawsuits](#), and a scathing report from the [Government Accountability Office](#), which found that the BOP did not know whether its use of segregated housing had any impact on prison safety, how it affected the individuals who endure it, or how much it all cost American taxpayers.

The audit team is led by [Ken McGinnis](#), the former warden who directs correctional programs at [CNA](#), a Virginia think tank known primarily for military contracting. CNA is beginning a one year, \$498,211 contract to provide a Special Housing Unit Review and Assessment for the National Institute of Corrections, which is itself an arm of the Bureau of Prisons.

On November 11, McGinnis and several colleagues met with representatives from the American Civil Liberties Union National Prison Project, National Religious Campaign Against Torture, CURE, Vera Institute for Justice, National Association for Mental Illness, and Prison Fellowship a group that, according to participants, hopes to function as a sort of advisory committee to the auditors. Among other things this group has asked to receive briefings as the study progresses and to provide feedback to the final report. The group does not include any formerly incarcerated people or family members of those currently held in solitary.

According to individuals who attended the meeting, McGinnis described his plans to tour several different prisons, including the government's notorious supermax, ADX Florence in Colorado, as well as Special Housing Units (SHUs) and Special Management Units (SMUs). An [overview of the audit](#) provided by CNA states that the project will make an operational assessment of 8 BOP special housing units that will include at a minimum 1) Florence ADX, Florence SHU and Florence SMU; 2) Either Allenwood SHU and SMU or Lewisburg SHU; 3) Three additional SMUs are yet to be determined. (For descriptions of SHUs and SMUs, see our [earlier post](#) on the subject.)

In the end run, according to McGinnis, as many as 13 units may be inspected. Teams of experts will be dispatched to these facilities over the next few months to tour the facilities, and talk with the people who run them and the prisoners held there. McGinnis did not say whether prisoners would be interviewed without corrections staff present, or given the opportunity to fill out anonymous surveys methods that are widely considered to be the only way to get candid information from people who are currently incarcerated.

Among CNA's tasks will be a comprehensive review of the Bureau's mental health assessment process. This controversial subject has been addressed in recent lawsuits and media reports, which show that numerous individuals with serious mental illness are being held at ADX, in violation of the BOP's own clear policy directives.

The audit will also review the application of inmate due process rights during duration of placement within SHU at ADX and or SMU. These due process rights, for the most part, consist of pro forma hearings and reviews, presided over solely by prison officials. Some critics argue that these processes lack even a semblance of fairness or independence.

The audit will pointedly not include any inmates with Special Administrative Measures (SAMs), which ban virtually all communications between those in prison and the outside world, and even permit monitoring of attorney-client communications. The auditors will not enter the section of ADX called H-Unit, which holds a group of the most restricted, high-security prisoners, including Ramzi Yousef (1993 World Trade Center bombings), Zacarias Moussaoui (9/11), and Ahmed Ghailani (US embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania).

According to one court document, individuals in H-Unit have had their mail suspended and their phone privileges and contact with immediate family members denied. Every phone call, every piece of mail is closely monitored by the FBI and some, according to the prisoners, is discarded, including pleas for help to attorneys. H-Unit banned prisoners from receiving books by President Obama, along with such innocuous publications as a book on world history, sports magazines, and even a magazine on crocheting. Individuals held at in the unit have been subjected to force feeding when they go on hunger strikes. (See [Voices from Solitary: Life in H-Unit, ADX Federal](#)

[Supermax.](#))

What is particularly unusual about H-Unit is the extent to which the FBI appears to be involved in its operation. (The FBI has no statutory authority to operate inside of federal prisons.) According to court documents, FBI agents listen in on phone conversations, read mail, and dictate punishment even when BOP personnel object.

Solitary Watch asked Shaina Vanek, the contracting officer in charge of the study and a National Institute of Corrections spokesperson who attended the meeting, confirmed in an email: the review of the Bureau of Prisons' use of Restricted Housing excludes a review of inmates with Special Administrative Measures (SAMs) and also the H unit at the ADX. The BOP has a population of approximately 219,000, and 54 inmates have SAMs.

While the numbers are indeed small, these individuals are subject to the most extreme, and potentially torturous, form of solitary confinement; their exclusion means that such practices will receive no review whatsoever.

According to one attendee at the November 11 meeting, McGinnis and his team seemed eager to secure buy in from the advocates present and to produce a report that will be accepted by them. One of the advocates was asked to represent the group in future communications, and another meeting may take place in the new year.

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

Solitary Watch encourages comments and welcomes a range of ideas, opinions, debates, and respectful disagreement. We do not allow name-calling, bullying, cursing, or personal attacks of any kind. Any embedded links should be to information relevant to the conversation. Comments that violate these guidelines will be removed, and repeat offenders will be blocked. Thank you for your cooperation.

I am not much of a proponent for solitary confinement, however it is hard to argue its effectiveness.

If you place a person in a situation where they have no contact with other humans, eventually they will go crazy.

Effectiveness of solitary confinement can someone tell me what the effectiveness is of solitary confinement?

Why we need the old newsreel type info commercials before such movies. Remember this article?

How Did Racism Get to Be So Popular?

By Stephen Marche on November 25, 2013

The sheer bulk of films about the history of race in recent years has been astonishing.

Well it is followed by this one.

Why I Wouldn't See 12 Years a Slave With a White Person

I did not want to have to entertain any of the likely responses from someone who could not see themselves in the skin of the enslaved men and women on the screen.

ENUMA OKORONOV 27 2013

I whispered to myself, It's a movie. It doesn't happen anymore. I could not remember the last time I felt so uncomfortable at the beginning of a film. Scene after scene my body did not relax once.

True it doesn't happen in the west? But read on

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/12/slaverys-global-comeback/266354/>

There are now twice as many people enslaved in the world as there were in the 350 years of the transatlantic slave trade.

There are likely more slaves in the world today than there have been at any other time in human history. For some quick perspective on that point: Over the entire 350 years of the transatlantic slave trade, 13.5 million people were taken out of Africa.

That's equal to just half the world's slave population today.

There is a significant slave presence across North Africa and the Middle East. There is also a major slave trade in Africa. Descent-based slavery persists in Mauritania, where children of slaves are passed on to their slave-holders' children.

This does not mean a caucasian would never understand slavery after all

Origin of the word slave:

1250-1300; Middle English so called because Slavs were commonly enslaved in the early Middle Ages.

As Leila Ahmed writes in her memoir: *A Border Passage* on page 97-98:

Before slavery was outlawed in 1885, slave women were not uncommon in Egypt's Turkish upper classes, often they were Circassian women who, were renowned for their beauty, were especially prized as concubines. The ruling class was made up of men and women (and their descendants) originally captured as children, mainly from the Slav and Balkan regions, and brought to Egypt. So common is white slavery today in the region that a Turkish slang word for whore is *Nataa*, a common Slavic name.

The males were trained for the military; the theory was that young boys raised together with no family other than one another and the officers training them would feel utter loyalty to this group and consequently make the best soldiers.

To us, with our notions of slavery grounded in the history of American society, the very idea that slaves constituted the upper classes is so counter-intuitive as to seem almost nonsensical. But in the Middle East, slaves and slave origins were so fundamentally part of aristocratic and royal life that for over a thousand years nearly all caliphs, kings and sultans in the region were the sons of slave mothers.

Circassian is a group of peoples from the North Caucasian mountains who tend to have light to fair skin.

In an *Ebony* Magazine article November, 1969 titled *White Servitude in the United States*,

African American historian Lerone Bennett, Jr., gives the following information about this period: ..the Afro-American, who was so often second in freedom, was also second in slavery.

Indeed, it will be revealed that the Afro-American was third in slavery. For he inherited his chains, in a manner of speaking, from the pioneer bondsmen, who were red and white.

As for who owned slaves in our early days as a nation.

As *The Atlantic's* first editor, James Russell Lowell, wrote in the magazine's endorsement of Abraham Lincoln for president in 1860:

The inevitable tendency of slavery is to concentrate in a few hands the soil, the capital, and the power of the countries where it exists, to reduce the non-slaveholding class to a continually lower and lower level of property, intelligence, and enterprise. Most whites could never have afforded a slave the cost of which equaled that of a house.

But in today's article the author wrote:

I mourn my seeming inability to fully trust those pink-skinned children of God.

How the media fuels hate.

Civil rights activists and leaders in the black community have encouraged protesters, to remain peaceful after the verdict in the George Zimmerman trial but those calls are increasingly falling on deaf ears. Although Zimmerman is half Jewish and Peruvian with features which seem to suggest his mother is of mixed blood herself. Quite possibly with African descendants given the history of slavery in Peru.

Never the less here is a quote:

Simpson, who is white, told WTMJ-TV that he was beaten by a group of black teens and that one of them said, This is for Trayvon Martin. The attack occurred the day after neighborhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman was cleared of all charges in the shooting death of Martin, a black 17-year-old, in Sanford, Fla.

But this is a trend across the US.

Knockout Game Turns Deadly: Police Investigating Attacks Around US, Videos
By Associated Press | November 25, 2013

The department's hate crimes task force is investigating, because some attacks have been against Orthodox Jews in Brooklyn.

Other articles which seem to suggest a further cause and effect:

How Did Racism Get to Be So Popular?
By Stephen Marche on November 25, 2013

The sheer bulk of films about the history of race in recent years has been astonishing. They used to be pure buzzkill. Last year, Tarantino, Spielberg, and Lucas all released films based on the theme of black oppression. The odds-on favorite for Best Picture at this year's Oscars is *12 Years a Slave*, but the competition will almost certainly include the summer surprise megahit, *The Butler*, as well as *Mandela* and probably *42*. And there are more to come next year, too. The director of *The Help* is slated to direct a James Brown biopic.

But what does this have to do with Solitary Confinement in prison?

According to Edward Bunker up until that time whites were still about 70% of the incarcerated population in San Quentin and he witnessed little racial tension. Then he noted in this article:

Harpers Magazine Feb. 1972

War Behind Walls

Page 4, a religious doctrine of hate:

what increases racial polarization in prison beyond conciliation is the mutative leap in black militant rhetoric. This rhetoric is heard within prison walls by unsophisticated minds and gives those blacks that already hate whites a rationale for murder. Everyone understands that blacks have been brutalized by generations of institutional racism, and recently by inertia and indifference. What the sympathetic fail to grasp is that sometimes the psychological truncation is so great that it cannot be repaired. Nothing is left but hate. They have no desire for motivation for anything but revenge

This view is echoed in this UT Law article covering a Hispanic American personal experience in the Texas prison system.

In Texas prisons, violence and racism reign
by Jorge Antonio Renaud
Published: Nov. 22

Jorge Antonio Renaud, a graduate student in the School of Social Work, spent 27 years in Texas prisons. This post is part of a Know series on the Texas prison system

Excerpt:

Relieved of the certainty that random violence might result in deadly retaliation, incoming gang bangers overwhelmingly black and Hispanic brought their street codes into prison: the drive-by mentality took hold, and it was visited against Anglos. These cons didn't limit their violence to enemies they adopted the attitude that any white boy was fair game, and that he could and should be broken by continual, unexpected gang beatings administered regardless of whether he fought back, or whether he showed heart. The unwilling joined white supremacy gangs for protection, while those men weary of constant beatings became sex slaves and cash cows.

In closing he wrote:

This aspect of Texas prisons results in thousands of men leaving the system with a predator mentality or a raging racism buried so deep it might never be eradicated. Reducing barriers to reentry is one thing understanding and relieving the trauma this unceasing violence leaves on the thousands of Texans returning to our streets is another.

The solution to reducing tension in prison is to stop feeding the hate mongers new excuses to hate.

Every drug offender is not a dealer.

The Penal State in an Age of Crisis
Hannah Holleman, Robert W. McChesney, John Bellamy Foster and R. Jamil Janna

Incarcerated drug offenders have soared 1,200 percent since 1980.

Michael K. Fauntroy, *Toward Reform of Criminal Justice*, Washington Times, April 28, 2009.

Those in prison due to drug possession now account for 53 percent of all federal prisoners, and 20 percent of state prisoners.

Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Prisoners in 2007*, Appendix Tables 11 and 12 (version revised February 12, 2009).

These offenses were victimless, and nonviolent.

The slowdown in the economic growth beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s converging with the emergence of radical social protest around the same period was accompanied by a rapid rise in public safety spending as a share of civilian government expenditures.

So significant was this shift that we can speak of a crowding out of welfare state spending (health, education, social services) by penal state spending (law enforcement, courts, and prisons) in the United States during the last third of a century.

The close relationship between trends in joblessness and incarceration evident in this period reflects both economic fluctuations and the fact that prisoners tend to come from the most economically vulnerable populations in the society.

Fewer than half of inmates [in U.S. prisons] held a full-time job at the time of their arraignment and two-thirds issue from households with annual income amounting to less than half of the so-called poverty line.

Loc Wacquant in Glenn C. Loury, *Race, Incarceration and American Values* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008), 60.

The latest national study of U.S. recidivism revealed that of prisoners released in 1994, 51.8 percent were back in prison, serving time for a new prison sentence or for a technical violation of their release, like failing a drug test, missing an appointment with their parole officer, or being arrested for a new crime.

These rates of recidivism are among the highest in the world, with Britain being the only possible rival for the top position.

Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994*, June 2002
Maybe we just need to provide meaningful work at a living wage.

The few middle class jobs left are in health care, teaching and prisons leaving the rest in low wage positions unable to make ends meet.

In addition to its effects on our physical health, financial stress threatens our mental well-being. A recent study found that unemployment, whether voluntary or involuntary, can significantly impact a persons mental health. It should come to no surprise then that, one out of every five American adults had mental illness in 2011, as reported by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. But only one of two Americans needing mental health care can afford treatment.

The general attitude of the unemployed is there is just no hope of ever finding a job with a livable wage. Thus drug use has followed the skyrocketing unemployment rate.
No wonder the drug of choice these days is heroin or so Im told.

Heroin is no party drug; the users simply shoot up then nod in and out of consciousness.

The goal of the user is to escape their reality and into a state of euphoria.

So they end up overdosing, dying, or lost in the judicial system where the lucky few have found job security in misery of others.

This following quote could be your Destiny!

Destiny finished her opiate binge, left the bathroom and returned to her high school class. Her head felt light. She put it down just for a second. The teacher did not notice. She went to her next class, and then another.

But something was wrong. She was too woozy. Destiny had taken drugs in school before, and it had never felt like this. She sat up straight, pushed out her chair and walked to the nurse.

Sirens, lights, a hospital and a breathing tube. The doctors pumped her stomach and sent her home. At 15, Destiny had overdosed on opiates.

<http://thedartmouth.com/2013/11/15/news/upper-valley-families-confront-rural-poverty?src=longreads>

With the demise of the middle class and growth in inequality comes great risk as John Steinbeck warned:

And the great owners with access to history, with eyes to read history and to know the great fact: when property accumulates in too few hands it is taken away. And that companion fact: when majorities of the people are hungry and cold they will take by force what they need. And the little screaming fact that sounds through all history: repression works only to strengthen and knit the repressed. The great owners ignored the three cries of history. The land fell into fewer hands, the number of the dispossessed increased, and every effort of the great owners was directed at repression. The money was spent for arms, for gas to protect the great holdings, and spies were sent to catch the murmuring of revolt so that it might be stamped out. The changing economy was ignored, plans for the change ignored; and only means to destroy revolt were considered, while the causes of revolt went on and in the eyes of the people there is the failure; and in the eyes of the hungry there is a growing wrath. In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage.

Distrust all in whom the impulse to punish is powerful. Friedrich Nietzsche

Oh I forgot to mention for those who feel hopeless and are leaders you have the CMU.

Leaders without followers are powerless.

No isolation but no communication.

That is unless you have corrupt guards which is a major problem of the system.

People will complain but you will stop driving sane people mad.

I dont believe there is one voice that can speak for those voicing their objection to long term solitary confinement.

But first thing they need to do is find are the roots of the problem.

I believe the excessive sentencing of drug offenses is counterproductive.

Without a reasonable release date people lose hope.

When they lose hope they decide to make the best out of the place they must live in.
It then becomes an incentive to organize into a power structure to control your environment.

Once one group organizes this drives others to form their own.

Leaders use our nations sad history to motivate their troops.

The uneducated are easily manipulated into believing they are victims.

So education is a key.

How many of the inmates realize how the power structure in this country has shifted?

Much ado is made over the racial imbalance of prisoners with the implication that it is a racist system.

So why not point out to them that:

Charles Samuels Jr., holds reins over the US prison system.

That our Attorney General is Eric Holder, and his Assistant Attorney General is Karol Mason.

The director of ATF is Todd Jones.

That Obama and his present nominee, Jeh Johnson for Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security are all African American leaders in the Department of Justice.

There are most likely many inmates that were arrested, tried and sentence by someone that looked just like them in a city with a Police Chief and/or Mayor also of their race.

And on the issue of general representation in government:

In the current survey of Decision Makers (a National Journal selection of 250 officials), just 48 percent of the top officials were white males. Blacks in the Administration are approaching numbers representing the population at large.

According to the Census Bureau, 13.6 percent of Americans are black. Thirteen percent of Obamas top decision makers are black as well.

And I am sure these men reach out to other members of their race when filling positions so it goes deeper than these men.

I dont point this stuff out to incite but to unite those held in prison.

There is no question that those in trouble will look to lay blame elsewhere, whether it be circumstance, race, gender, social class or any number of arguable excuses. These excuses usually succeed in only clouding the obvious issues, not the least of which is consequence. Everyone knows that dealing drugs is illegal regardless of personal belief; everyone knows that murder is illegal; that molesting children is illegal; that bank robbery is illegal and on and on and on. If you knew that slinging crack cocaine on the street could bring about a 40 years prison sentence and you got caught, who is to blame? The disparity in sentencing becomes secondary to the fact that the person knew the potential consequences of their illegal actions.

That stated, our politicians love to placate potential voters and every election cycle contains a, Im tough on crime segment. With that comes the sales pitch to end this, that or the other crime that has people scared at the time. Along with this sales pitch comes the absolute inability to effectively house the thousands of offenders that will be rounded up and locked away. The same politician spouting off about stopping crime will invariably vote to reduce funding to correctional systems in another attempt to make the voters think he/she is tough on budgetary issues. In the end, who is the biggest loser? The criminals that knew the rules of the game when they entered the arena or the correctional systems that are tasked with housing far too many inmates with too few resources or support systems.

This thread could go on forever with the end game being if you want a champagne correctional system that provides safety, opportunity and fairness for everyone involved, then fund it accordingly. Until our bureaucrats quit promising what they cant deliver, and people quit expecting a different outcome than the rule book dictates (the law) then we will continue to debate the same issue.

Ill leave with this final note: Inmates are placed in SHU for a variety of reason, most often because they pose a safety risk to staff and their fellow inmates. Sometimes they are placed there because they are at risk if injury if they remain in general population. Inmates are placed in a SMU program because they were such a huge management issue at a mainline institution that the SMU is considered a final resolution. Both housing situations are staff intensive and very expensive to maintain. Thus, it is highly unlikely that SHU/SMU bed-space is maintained for the sole purpose of being mean to inmates.

Inmates placed in a Supermax or CMU environment pose an extreme risk to staff and inmates, both directly and indirectly. These inmates are typically terrorists or gang leaders that use communication means to order murders, drug deals and coordinate terrorist activity. Although this may seem draconian, its the best correctional systems have come up considering the consequences of letting these inmates walk a general population yard with access to phones, email and the USPS. The press, politicians and the public tend to frown on letting inmates call hits and bombings from behind bars.

Here is a link from which I took the following quote.

http://www.legalaffairs.org/issues/January-February-2003/review_brook_janfeb2003.msp

Despite this vehement defense of the solitary system, in the period after the Civil War, the regimen at Eastern State was slowly abandoned.

Historians have theorized that the rise in foreign immigrants among the prison population decreased public sympathy for prisoners and made expensive penal reform less politically popular during the postwar period.

Without enough funding to keep the system running, inmates were frequently doubled up in cells.

In 1913, the solitary system was officially abandoned.

Solitary confinement became a short-term punishment for misbehaving prisoners rather than the prisons standard operating procedure.

How is it that we are exactly where we were 145 years ago?

Wouldnt it be ironic then if 100 years later we abandon it again?

Without fully understanding the entire correctional setting, not just segregation, one cannot determine what to do with those inmates that cannot or are unwilling to effectively program with other inmates or staff.

Some may think that providing more space for confined offenders would solve many of the violence and programming issues, but that totally puts aside the dynamics that arise when you put humans together in a community, no matter how large. especially of the same sex. But that is an issue for another forum..

Considering the current system of separating bad inmates from good inmates, what would the other side suggest as a viable alternative, considering of course the budgetary constraints placed on the systems by the state and federal government?

@Rick Harnes

You wrote you cant opine about things you know nothing about.

Sounds similar to:

A man has no ears for that to which experience has given him no access.

by Friedrich Willhelm Nietzsche 1844-1900

According to Andrew Cohen of the Atlantic he was cleverly evasive and gave up little.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/11/how-not-to-hold-an-oversight-hearing/281207/>

Seems maybe we need to hear from both sides, so those with no experience at all, and thus no dog in the fight, can make an educated decision.

To hear from both sides on this important issue would constitute an actual discussion. As presented, this issue is already one sided in that the BOPs rep brought nothing to the table. Thus, correctional systems in this country are defending themselves while on their heels; correctional systems that are chronically under-budgeted while housing far too many offenders.

After working within the federal correctional system from coast to coast for 24 years, I am certain there is a better way to handle offenders deemed unfit to program with other inmates, but shooting holes in the only option provided for correctional managers is not the answer. An honest assessment by those in the know; people that actually know what theyre talking about. say for instance, a panel of former SHU/SMU inmates and current correctional experts, would actually bring usable data to this issue. Its unlikely that a panel of anti-solitary confinement advocates will bring much in the form of usable suggestions to the corrections field when theyve already developed an unrealistic view of their subject. Case in point Solitary Confinement bed space is such a premium in this age of overcrowded prisons that an inmate on single cell status or solitary confinement status is pretty unusual and has a lot more to do with the inmates inability to get along with another inmate than the administrations desire to keep them alone. Just one point that could evoke a long conversation.

Actually, it would be fair to actually interview those that work in our High security prisons throughout the country rather than count on the biased opinions of those who found themselves in solitary or better yet, those that have never worked nor been confined in a prison. As with most things, you cant opine about things you know nothing about. On another thread, the Federal BOP was absolutely failed by its Director Charles Samuels when grilled by Dick Durbin regarding the systems use of SHU/SMU bed space in federal prisons, but should not reflect on the BOPs ability to effectively manage what is being called solitary confinement in this so-called article.

The difference in the two charts are the words live monitoring when possible for the SMU. I do not know if there is enough man power to sit down and listen to each call live.

This suggests that some may be recorded for later review.

They probably listen closer to certain inmates calls than others.

They may use software to search the message for key terms or phrases.

I know that all federal inmate phone calls are monitored, not just those in SHU or SMU.

What is needed to make this an effective study is an ex prisoner that survived years in solitary confinement and the torture it truly is.

One major difference I found in the chart is the live monitoring of phone calls in the SMU and use of non-contact, monitored, video-conference type visits conducted in the SMU.

SHU has one phone call per month while the SMU has a Min of 2 completed calls a month which we now know are monitored. (So I guess they are fishing for intelligence.)

The SHU has a Min of 5 hours of exercise while the SMU just says just five hours.
So the wording sounds like you could have more hours of out of cell exercise in a SHU.

The SHU has education available there is no mention of education for the SMU.

Sorry, I followed the link in your article, but I still do not understand the difference between a SHU and SMU.

It is confusing, Margaret, in large part because there is very little difference! The most detailed explanation can be found in the chart on page 7 of this GAO report: <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/654349.pdf>. Hope this helps.

Do you have additional information about Prison Ministries, and their role? Your wording leads me to think their participation would be informal, unofficial, and at the behest of the commission. One item I'd really appreciate is the official name of the group; a google search results in many prison ministries of all kinds, but no single organization named Prison Ministries. Great article, learned much, and hope someone can answer my question. Best regards, Mike

Our error, Mike, and thanks for catching it. The correct name of the group is Prison Fellowship. You will definitely find it online. And yes, our understanding is the organizations were invited to meet once with the auditors and have no official role.

Hopefully an audit will include USP Lewisburgs SMU and not just Lewisburgs SHU like the article states because the SMU at USP Lewisburg is by far the most horrific facility in the BOP.

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