

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/04/07/complete-lawlessness-at-orleans-parish-prison/>

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | April 7, 2012

Check out our [latest piece over at MotherJones.com](#), on a new lawsuit filed on behalf of inmates at New Orleans main jail. Here are some excerpts:

As hellholes go, there are few worse places in America than the Orleans Parish Prison.

New Orleans teeming city jail first hit the radar of most Americans following Hurricane Katrina, when thousands of inmates were abandoned for days in flooded cells without food, water, ventilation, or electricity some of them standing in sewage-tainted water up to their chests, [according to the ACLU](#). But OPPs problems did not begin with Katrina, nor end in the storms wake, when prisoners were shipped back to the jails surviving buildings.

This week, the Southern Poverty Law Center filed a federal [class-action lawsuit](#) on behalf of OPPs inmates. The 38-page complaint which names as defendants Sheriff Marlin Gusman, along with the jails wardens and medical directors describes a facility where prisoners are at imminent risk of serious harm. About 44 percent of the inmates are there awaiting trial, and haven't been convicted of the crimes they were charged with. But pretrial detention at OPP, the suit contends, is in itself a brutal punishment that can expose people to physical and sexual abuse, and even death.

Rapes, sexual assaults, and beatings are commonplace, the lawsuit states. Violence regularly occurs at the hands of sheriffs deputies, as well as other prisoners. People living with serious mental illnesses languish without treatment, left vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. These conditions have created a public safety crisis that affects the entire city.

Its just complete lawlessness in there, Katie Schwartzmann, the SPLC attorney representing the prisoners, told us in an interview. The place is full of knives. There are tons of assaults, beatings.

Stints at OPP are particularly horrendous for inmates with mental illness, whom the SPLC believes make up as much as two-thirds of the jails population though their condition often goes undetected, since theres no real classification system.

When inmates are booked into OPP, the lawsuit notes, prison officials suspend their medications for 30 days and sometimes longer: Unsurprisingly, this practice causes some individuals to experience suicidal ideation. When this happens, suicidal prisoners with mental health needs are transferred to a direct observation cell, in which they are held almost naked for days.

Schwartzmann cites one inmate, [William Goetzee](#), who tried to snatch a security officers gun outside a courthouse, professing that he wanted to kill himself. They bring him to OPP, she says. He attempted to hang himself. They cut him down and two days later he killed himself by eating toilet paper. He ate enough toilet paper that he asphyxiated. Tell me if thats not deliberate indifference!

Inmates deemed mentally ill but not suicidal are transferred to the psychiatric tiers where they are locked down in their cells for 23 hours a day and deprived of mental health interventions, notes the complaint. People living there are not allowed to go outside or visit with their families. Overhead lights are on 24 hours per day, and the tier contains actively psychotic people living on the ground in overcrowded cells. Deputies do not walk the tiers. Rape is rampant.

Prisoners seeking mental health services, the suit continues, are discouraged from seeking necessary care not only by the strict lockdown but also because they are charged a copayment for submitting the request.

You can read the rest of the article [here](#).

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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Since much on this site also deals with race I feel this National Review (NR) contributors fate is relevant on here. It reflects the promise of a new generation of thinkers on the right:

In a 2003 interview, Derbyshire was asked about the magazine and its attitudes. NR generally permits a surprisingly broad range of views to be aired, he said, but racial matters were different:

I frequently meet college students who tell me they are conservative, who have all the attributes of what seems to me a broadly conservative outlook on life and society, who want to read conservative publications yet who have a deep dislike of many of the topics not just the point of view, the actual topics that interest older readers.

This shows up most especially in the area of race, and the penumbra of issues immigration, for instance, or crime-fighting that are associated with it. The kind of thoughtful and intelligent young people that NR would like to have as readers understand that there are problems and absurdities connected with race in our public life, and are happy to hear arguments pro and con about racial profiling, affirmative action, and so on. They are, however, determined to make the multiracial society work, they believe it can be made to work in spite of the hustlers and liberal guilt-mongers, and they are unwilling to read, say, or think anything that could be construed as unkind towards people of other races.

Its heartening that Derbyshire saw, in the younger generation of conservatives, a determination to make a multiracial society work.

Parting ways with Derbyshire isnt going to do anything to improve race relations in America. But it has brought National Review a step closer to relying on the younger rather than the older generation of conservatives. On subjects related to race thats a very good thing.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/04/how-john-derbyshire-perceived-racial-attitudes-at-national-review/255598/>

There must be a means of redress against such savage treatment and inhumanity. Does any of the media in New Orleans such as the Times Picayune cover this? It is a good paper.. All of the perpetrators of this misery and death should be punished.

Ultimately, enough of Derbyshires colleagues called for his head that he was fired.

<http://www.thenation.com/blog/167276/john-derbyshire-national-review-and-conservatives-race-problem>

Well this week we read about the talk that blacks give to their children (one note; as a poor white youth I also followed these same tactics to avoid the brutality of the police who are known to brutalize all the poor. My teenage legs would buckle whenever I spotted a police cruiser because I feared the police more than the numerous gang members that I regularly encountered .)

Today I read several articles about John Derbyshires article titled: The Talk: Nonblack Version, that asked why he has not been fired yet. By the way I predict that he will be.

But I also read about the need to use proper etiquette while under arrest. Although I do not agree with some of suggestions of the author I find it revealing that this author found it necessary to point out these sad facts to a naive public.

I never spent more than a couple weeks in solitary confinement myself because I never protested or confronted the man with the keys. Now you may say that I was weak while I would say that I was wise enough to understand who was in control.

Bend or break, justice can never be found in any jail.

<http://www.theatlanticwire.com/national/2012/04/proper-etiquette-when-youre-under-arrest/50800/>

This is not just a problem in N.O. Excerpts from articles:

The scale and the brutality of our prisons are the moral scandal of American life. Every day, at least fifty thousand men full house at Yankee Stadium wake in solitary confinement, often in supermax prisons or prison wings, in which men are locked in small cells, where they see no one, cannot freely read and write, and are allowed out just once a day for an hour's solo exercise.

Prison rape is so endemic the Department also released, for the first time, its own estimate of the number of inmates who endured sexual abuse while behind bars in a one-year period: 216,600 that it is routinely held out as a threat, part of the punishment to be expected.

<http://myemail.constantcontact.com/216-600-Inmates-Sexually-Abused-Annually.html?soid=1102543192387&aid=yHVMwSdp0Ys>

The subject is standard fodder for comedy, and an uncooperative suspect being threatened with rape in prison is now represented, every night on television, as an ordinary and rather lovable bit of policing.

The normalization of prison rape like eighteenth-century jape about watching men struggle as they die on the gallows will surely strike our descendants as chillingly sadistic, incomprehensible on the part of people who thought themselves civilized.

The opposite of compassion is not hatred, its indifference.

The following ruling should concern us all.

The recent 5-to-4 U.S. Supreme Court decision authorizing prison officials to strip-search any of the 13 million people arrested every year is just another example of how prisoner rights are our rights.

The case was brought by Albert W. Florence, who had been mistakenly arrested for failing to pay a court fine which he had, in fact, paid and then was forced to squat naked and cough in front of guards. The infraction could have been even flimsier: Justice Stephen Breyer pointed out that one person had been subjected to this humiliating invasion of privacy after riding a bicycle without an audible bell.

Justice Anthony Kennedy rebutted this objection by noting that people detained for minor offenses can turn out to be the most devious and dangerous criminals. Kennedy's reasoning better to subject an entire population to degrading treatment than to overlook one dangerous actor.

The court's decision continued a trend that began after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks of giving jailers more leeway in searching those picked up even for the most minor offenses.

Just as the Florence decision was being prepared, the Department of Defense released a previously classified training manual used to prepare American pilots for resistance to foreign governments that might use illegal and immoral techniques to render them cooperative. Key in this manual are the precise practices highlighted in Florence.

Body-cavity searches are performed, it explains, to make the prisoner feel uncomfortable and degraded. Forced nudity and invasion of the body make the prisoner feel helpless, by removing all items that provide the prisoner with psychological support. In other words, the strip search is an essential step in efforts to destroy an individual's sense of self-confidence, well-being, and even his or her identity. The value of this tool has been recognized by authoritarian governments around the world, and now, thanks to the Roberts Court, it will belong to the standard jailhouse repertoire in the United States.

Something to consider the next time you walk Fido without scooping up his droppings: a cop may well be watching, ready to seize the opportunity to invade your rectum.

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