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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | October 21, 2019

The *Texas Observer* published an [article](#) about Russell Johnson, who died this past summer in solitary confinement in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) Coffield Unit. His sister, Tambra Marsh, had noticed during her visits that her brother had psychologically deteriorated since his placement in solitary in 2016. Johnson talked about the voices haunting him in his cell and showed signs of deep depression. After two years and eight months in solitary, Johnson committed suicide. While the TDCJ has not provided data on suicides and suicide attempts in solitary confinement, a total of 40 people died by suicide in Texas prisons last year. Seven of the 35 people who committed suicide in TDCJ custody in 2017 were in solitary, according to the Texas Civil Rights Project. Overall, the TDCJ reports holding 4,200 people in solitary confinement.

The *Charlotte Observer* [reported](#) that the ACLU of North Carolina and North Carolina Prisoner Legal Services filed a class action lawsuit on behalf of four incarcerated people held in solitary confinement, claiming the practice constitutes cruel and unusual punishment and causes serious psychological and physiological harm. According to the lawsuit, North Carolina holds about 3,000 people in solitary, hundreds of whom have been isolated for several months or years. Two of the plaintiffs, both struggling with mental illness, have been in solitary for a decade or more. The lawsuit aims to restrict solitary to be used only as a last resort, and only for the shortest duration possible. The director of ACLU of NC pointed out that for states that have implemented heavy restrictions on the use of solitary, what we see is prisons actually become safer.

CBS [reported](#) that 43-year-old Roylan Hernandez Daz died last week in solitary confinement at the Richwood Correctional Center, an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facility in Louisiana. Hernandez Daz and his wife came to the U.S. seeking asylum from Cuba, but despite passing the credible fear test, Hernandez Daz was still detained in May and separated from his wife. According to another detained man, Hernandez Daz got desperate after a judge denied him bond, though he says he met the necessary requirements. After the hearing, Hernandez Daz was placed in solitary confinement, or el poso, meaning the hole. ICE officials claim he was isolated because he had begun a hunger strike. Hernandez Daz hanged himself in his solitary cell.

Georgia Public Broadcasting Radio [reported](#) that local activists are protesting conditions at the Cobb County Jail, outside Atlanta, after 36-year-old Kevin Wingo became the fourth person to die at the jail in a single year. The sheriff's office has not released the cause of Wingo's death, which took place four days after he arrived at the jail. Timothy Gardner, the attorney representing Wingo's sister, condemned the jail for locking people down in solitary confinement and preventing people from calling and visiting their families. Gardner said, Cobb County is grossly understaffed but nonetheless you cannot change that by locking inmates up and depriving them from their civil rights. These are people not animals.

[According](#) to Freedom for Immigrants, Cuban asylum seekers held at the Otero County Processing Center (OCPC) in New Mexico have engaged in self-harm in protest of the conditions at the facility. Two of the immigrants slit their wrists and nearly 20 others said they planned on doing the same. Several of the expected participants were reportedly taken to solitary confinement. A 2017 report from the Department of Homeland Security revealed abusive conditions at OCPC, including retaliation and excessive use of solitary. And a 2018 investigation by Freedom for Immigrants and the Advocate Visitors with Immigrants in Detention (AVID) also found solitary used in retaliation. Volunteers with AVID wrote to the state legislature, If the situation is not quickly resolved, more men will slit their wrists and large numbers of others will go on hunger strike.

The *Palm Beach Post* [reported](#) that the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office has settled a lawsuit with the county's Legal Aid Society and the Human Rights Defense Center, claiming that the jail inflicted cruel and unusual punishment in placing youth in solitary confinement. According to the lawsuit, youth faced abuse from guards and were refused clean water, showers, education and medical treatment. One young person recalled experiencing hallucinations in solitary confinement, where he would watch a non-existent television on the blank wall of his 6 by 12-foot cell. The county and school district have been ordered to pay \$420,000 to settle the lawsuit, as well as end the practice of placing youth in solitary. The sheriff has since instituted segregated housing where kids are allowed to take showers, participate in classes, access mental health counselors, and have recreation, according to a Human Rights Defense Center lawyer.

The New York *Daily News* [reported](#) that New York City has ordered a stop to transfers of people held on Rikers Island to the Albany

County Correctional Facility until 2022, after a lawsuit claimed young men had experienced solitary confinement and physical brutality at the hands of Albany guards. The Substitute Jail Orders, transferring youth to jails outside the city, occurred after New York City banned the use of solitary confinement for people younger than 22 years old. In 2022, when transfers may resume, Albany County will be required to follow the same restrictions on solitary confinement as jails in the city, and people will be provided notice before they are transferred. Attorney Doug Lieb, who filed the lawsuit on behalf of four young men, said, The citys responsibility for (inmates) well-being doesnt stop at the northern border of the Bronx. It doesnt end by shipping them somewhere else.

The City [reported](#) that New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio failed to renew Board of Correction Commissioner Bryanne Hamills tenure, days before a proposal to restrict the use of solitary confinement is supposed to be introduced. Hamill, one of nine board members who oversee the citys jails, said she was not surprised that she was thrown off the board. My only regret, she wrote, is that I cannot see this rule-making, initiated pursuant to my motion nearly four years ago, to its conclusion. Without Hamill, it is predicted that the vote will be tight. Restrictions have already reduced the population held in solitary confinement in New York Citys jails, but the death in isolation of transgender woman Layleen Polanco on Rikers Island last June catalyzed a push by advocates for a ban on nearly all uses of solitary.

PennLive.com published an opinion [piece](#) written by My Le, who was held in solitary confinement for nearly six months at Riverside Correctional Facility for adult women in Philadelphia when she was seventeen. Le says she was kept in solitary because, as a teenager, she was not supposed to be housed with adults. Le, now a youth organizer with Youth Art & Self-empowerment Project, argues that youth should never be kept in adult prisons. Adult jails and prisons are not built for young people and they are harming them mentally and physically, Le writes, and Isolation is harmful for anyone, but especially a young person whose brain is still continuing to grow. Le calls for Pennsylvania to come into compliance with the federal Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention Act, which prohibits holding youth in adult facilities, and calls for Governor Tom Wolfs Council on Reform to invest in community resources that would minimize youth incarceration.

Valerie Kiebal was a contributing writer and editorial and project manager for Solitary Watch, and is now the media director of Straight Ahead, which is building a decarceration movement throughout Pennsylvania. Her work has also appeared in *The Root*, *Truthout*, the *Chicago Reporter*, and *Shadowproof*.

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

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.

Im an inmate at a unit in Texas which never has a year go by without deaths resulting from murder or suicides. The problem with most of the activities that go on which induce, influence, and cause the result of death is that they are not easily articulable or even identifiable by those affected. This is because of the psychological attacks which are constant, unseen, well coordinated after decades of practice, and more easily managed and communicated through the user of modern technology and apparent implementation of military-developed research on psychological warfare and control through the power of suggestion and other darker techniques.

The closest thing I can find on the internet which resembles an accurate depiction of what goes on inside Texas Prisons is apparently a new term which has not been easily proofed by supporting evidence. Please do not let the propaganda debunking the terms. I believe the debunking to be attempts made by those who support such actions, although I also believe the victims of these attacks arent able to correctly identify what theyre going through because each would react and internalize things differently based on their susceptibility, intelligence, or existing mental health. The two terms Im referring to are Gang-Stalking (group/community stalking) and Targeted Individuals. Please research these two topics before we communicate again and Im able to give details Descriptions of events and a culture which practices verbatim these types of abused, and right under everyones nose.

I am above average intelligence, do not have a mental illness, and can articulate lly allay facts. I wish to speak more to anyone able to help end the constant injustice and genocide taking place at Texas correctional facilities, facilitated at the hands of the State and its employees.

Regards,

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