

# The United States Is The Largest Prison Camp In The World

## The Criminal Criminal Justice (sic) System

By [Dr. Paul Craig Roberts](#) and [Soren Korsgaard](#)

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*The United States has the highest incarceration rates in the world. The US not only has a far higher percentage of its population in prison than allegedly “authoritarian” governments, but also has a larger total number of citizens imprisoned than China, a country with four times the US population. The US is by far the largest prison camp in the world.*

The conditions, such as solitary confinement, in which many US prisoners are kept are strictly illegal under international law, but that means nothing to “freedom and democracy America.” Solitary confinement, especially confinement inside tiny cells, is like being buried alive. Yet, “freedom and democracy America” is subjecting more than 100,000 citizens to this horror as I write. We hear so much about “America’s moral conscience,” but where is this conscience?

Other prisoners are used as a cheap work force for US military and consumer industries. Prison labor and the privatization of prisons have created an enormous demand for prisoners. American citizens are shoveled into the profit-making prison system regardless of innocence or guilt.

There is no doubt that a large percentage of US prisoners are innocent or imprisoned for victimless crimes, such as drug use. According to official US government statistics, 97 percent of all felonies are settled with plea bargains. Consequently, the police evidence and prosecutor’s case is never tested in court. Not even the innocent want a trial, because the jurors are brainwashed and biased against everyone charged, and the punishments that result from trial conviction are much harsher than those given to a compliant defendant who agrees to a plea bargain. Despite the US Constitution’s prohibition of self-incrimination, the US prison population consists of people coerced into self-incrimination. [There is no justice whatsoever in the US criminal justice \(sic\) system.](#)

“Law and order conservatives” have fantasy ideas about US prisoners lounging around watching TV all day, playing sports in the open air, and studying in prison libraries for law degrees—a life of leisure at public expense. Soren Korsgaard, editor of a crime journal, tells us what life inside an American prison is really like.

Paul Craig Roberts

The United States Criminal Justice System Violates Human Rights

Søren Korsgaard

The US criminal justice system has a long history, continuing to this day, of systematically violating prisoners' human rights and, hence, international law. Although it has moved away from executions of those who committed their crimes as minors, the justice system still condones wrongful executions as evidenced by a study from 2014, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, in which it was concluded, conservatively, that at least 1 in 25 of US death row inmates is innocent of the crime for which they were sentenced to death. Even though this figure, along with facts related to dubious executions, are readily available for public consumption, a massive 55-60% of the US population still supports the death penalty.

Considering that such polls are conducted, it is safe to say that most have given the death penalty some thought; however, the conditions of US prisons are evidently a rare topic of reflection or conversation, except that most informed citizens are, at least, somewhat acquainted with the practices associated with the Guantanamo Bay detention camp and other so-called 'black sites.' These practices, of course, include detention without charge or trial, various methods of torture, isolation, and indefinite imprisonment of minors in flagrant violation of international law. What is less known is that equally criminal human rights abuses take place in US maximum security facilities, so-called supermax prisons, and it is therefore essential that the conditions of these are put into the spotlight. In fact, as will be shown in this article, these supermax prisons have been specifically built for torture in the form of prolonged solitary confinement, which goes by many names including isolation, administrative segregation, management control units, protective custody, restrictive housing, and special needs units.

What is solitary confinement? It is typically defined as the physical and social isolation of individuals who are confined to their cells for 22 to 24 hours per day. According to a detailed report by Amnesty International, the US "stands virtually alone in the world in incarcerating thousands of prisoners in long-term or indefinite solitary confinement," as more than 40 states operate supermax facilities, collectively housing over 25,000 inmates that are kept in near-constant solitary confinement. In other prisons, an additional 80,000 inmates are at any time kept in isolation for variable periods. Solitary confinement has become the first resort in many prisons, and it has been shown that even absurdities can lead to years in isolation. For example, men and women have been placed in isolation for "months or years not only for violent acts but for possessing contraband, testing positive for drug use, ignoring orders, or using profanity ..... or report rape or abuse by prison officials." Perhaps the most absurd example concerns a group of Rastafarian men who were placed in solitary confinement, some for more than a decade, for refusing to cut their hair as it was fundamental to their faith.

The international community has for a long time discouraged nations from using solitary confinement. For example, when UN's Special Rapporteur on torture and other inhuman punishment, Juan E. Méndez, delivered his report before the UN's General Assembly about solitary confinement, he absolutely condemned the use of prolonged isolation and equated it with torture. He added that it should only be used under "exceptional circumstances, for as short a time as possible." After citing various scientific studies, which showed that "lasting mental damage" can result from even a "few days of social isolation," he stated that "indefinite and prolonged solitary confinement" should be absolutely prohibited. Méndez also urged nations to end the practice of solitary confinement in pre-trial detention. Méndez's recommendations were later codified in the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules on the Treatment of Prisoners, known as the "Mandela Rules."

Extremely harsh sentences and absurdities leading to isolation have also not gone unnoticed by the UN, especially in the context of underage offenders. Among others, Méndez has scolded the US for “being the only country in the world that continues to sentence children to life in prison without parole,” a practice which violates international law as it is considered a “cruel and inhumane punishment” in accordance with article 37(a) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that “no child [below 18 years of age] shall be subjected to ... capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release ....”

During the production of the report on torture and isolation, US officials had openly opposed Méndez’s investigation by restricting his access to prisons and various types of documentation; for example, the number of prisoners in solitary confinement is an estimate as such documentation is not available to the public or even the UN. ADX, a supermax, was one of the prisons that US authorities did not want Mendez to inspect and scrutinize. It is located in Florence, Colorado, and has gained a notorious reputation, even internationally, and it is guarded by secrecy and censorship. The former warden has described it as a “clean version of hell,” and that “it’s far much worse than death.”

Pursuant to Amnesty International’s report, “Entombed: Isolation in the US Federal Prison System,” the vast majority of ADX prisoners are kept in their cells for 22-24 hours per day “in conditions of severe physical and social isolation.” The designers of ADX (as well as other supermax prisons) had that specific purpose in mind as thick steel-reinforced concrete walls prevent inmates from having contact with those in adjacent cells, and “most cells have an interior barred door as well as a solid outer door, compounding the sense of isolation.” When prisoners are not confined to their cells for 24 hours per day due to understaffing and other issues, they can leave their cells for a few hours per week to “exercise” in a “bare interior room or in small individual yards or cages, with no view of the natural world.” Cells are equipped with a shower and toilet, minimizing the need for leaving them. The inmates are almost invariably separated from other humans, and even “checks by medical and mental health staff, take place at the cell door and medical and psychiatric consultations are sometimes conducted remotely, through tele-conferencing.”

It is no surprise that under these conditions, suicide attempts, self-mutilations, and acute psychoses are rampant among the inmates. Amnesty International concludes that “the conditions of isolation at ADX breach international standards for humane treatment and, especially when applied for a prolonged period or indefinitely, amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in violation of international law.”

According to the official policy of the Bureau of Prisons, mentally ill inmates are not kept in isolation. It has, however, been profusely documented that inmates with serious psychiatric disorders are kept in isolation and many inmates with no diagnosis have become seriously mentally deranged. Many of these instances have been detailed in various lawsuits. In one lawsuit against ADX, it was detailed that many inmates “suffer from chronic mental illness and some routinely smear themselves and their cells with their own [feces], howl or shriek continuously or bang their metal showers at all hours of the day or night.” This lawsuit also detailed several specific instances of inmates deteriorating mentally during solitary confinement at ADX, one of whom was John Powers.

He was originally placed in the Control Unit (the most isolated part of ADX) to serve a 60-month sentence, but he was frequently transferred to the federal medical facility at Springfield after numerous incidents of self-mutilation. Upon being ‘stabilized’ with various

pharmaceuticals, he was promptly returned to the CU at ADX. His medical records showed that he had lacerated his scrotum, bit off his finger, inserted staples into his forehead, and slashed his wrists. Originally, he was ordered to serve 60 months in the Control Unit, but because he did not comply with the behavioral requirements, he spent an unfathomable ten years and five months in that unit before finally being transferred to the lesser restricted General Population Unit (GPU). In the GPU, officials continued to deprive him of mental health care, and subsequently he sliced off his earlobes, sawed through his Achilles tendon, and mutilated his genitals. In 2013, he was transferred to another high-security facility and reportedly “rammed his head into an exposed piece of metal in his cell, causing a skull fracture and brain injury .... [later he was found inserting] metal into his brain cavity through the hole that remain[ed] in his skull.”

The psychological effects of solitary confinement have been well-known for decades and are not even controversial; for instance, in the early 1990s, Dr. Stuart Grassian conducted extensive interviews with people held in restricted housing in the Pelican Bay State Prison, the only supermax in California. Dr. Grassian discovered that solitary confinement “induces a psychiatric disorder characterized by hypersensitivity to external stimuli, hallucinations, panic attacks, cognitive deficits, obsessive thinking, paranoia, and a litany of other physical and psychological problems. Psychological assessments of men in solitary at Pelican Bay indicated high rates of anxiety, nervousness, obsessive ruminations, anger, violent fantasies, nightmares, trouble sleeping, as well as dizziness, perspiring hands, and heart palpitations.” Considering the humanitarian aspects and that prolonged solitary confinement is a breach of international law, it is striking that the US continues to enforce it upon its convicts as well as those awaiting trial. It appears that inmates are perceived as objects that need to be dealt with in the most efficient way possible for prison staff regardless of international regulations and recommendations.

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