

## Torture in U.S. Prisons

by Sara Olson, Tackling Torture at the Top

Today, 2.3 million Americans live in what are often the human rights travesties known as American prisons. In all, nearly 7 million people are under some form of carceral supervision; parole, probation, house arrest, or electronic monitoring. The last form has become big business for private security corporations. There are today many victims of torture in U.S. jails, prisons, and juvenile detention centers.

Over 80,000 prisoners are suffering solitary confinement in American prisons, many for 20 years or more. The National Religious Campaign Against Torture notes that “isolation fundamentally alters the brain, creates and exacerbates mental illness...and violates human dignity.” According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, in a 2011 report, stated that “half of all prison suicides occur in conditions of solitary confinement.”

Police departments use torture to coerce confessions or to support them. Former Illinois governor, George Ryan, declared a moratorium on the state’s Death Penalty in 2000 that resulted in the exoneration of ten men whose convictions had been obtained due to Chicago police torture, often involving electric shock to their bodies.

The Death Penalty continues in the U.S. Most western governments have outlawed the Death Penalty and many refuse to extradite people to the U.S. if they face the Death Penalty.

Increasing Use of Life Without Parole (LWOP) sentences, often called “the other death sentence.”

The offenses at Abu Ghraib prison and the torture enabled by George Bush’s War on Terror stems from practices in U.S. prisons. In 2005, Deborah Davies, of the BBC’s Channel 4, examined videotapes of events in U.S. jails and prisons that serve to exonerate guards who engage in what have been, and tragically remain, *legal* procedures. The tapes show electrocutions of prisoners with cattle prods, burning with toxic chemicals and people attacked by dogs.

Many American women and men are sexually assaulted, raped, and beaten while in custody by both guards and predatory inmates every day.

There is increasing use of restraint chairs, often on mentally ill prisoners, thousands of whom fill contemporary jails and prisons.

Increasingly, we see the use of tasers by police and prison guards that have killed people when the current is applied.

The United States has 5% of the world’s population and 25% of its prisoners