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Inmates Stab Warden and Post to Facebook During Riot at Alabama's Death Row Prison



By Tess Owen (/contributor/tess-owen)

March 12, 2016 |

The prison that houses Alabama's death row is on lockdown following a riot that saw the facility's warden and a guard stabbed, and at least one fire set by inmates, who used contraband cell phones to document the mayhem on social media.

The uprising began late Friday night at the William C. Holman Correctional Facility, a 1,031-bed facility about 50 miles north of Mobile in the city of Atmore. A large contingent of Holman inmates are serving life without parole, and there are 168 cells set aside for death row inmates, who are executed on site at the state's only death chamber.

The Alabama Department of Corrections said in a statement that around 100 inmates were involved in the melee, which began with a fight in a dormitory. A guard was stabbed when he tried to detain one of the inmates, the statement said. Warden Carter Davenport was also stabbed when he and other corrections officers attempted to intervene. Neither of the stab wounds were life threatening.

Related: [A Plan to Slash the Exorbitant Cost of Phone Calls for US Prisoners Got Put on Hold](#) 

The state deployed three emergency response teams to quell the revolt, which was confined to a housing unit of the prison, according to local reports (http://www.al.com/news/birmingham/index.ssf/2016/03/reported_riot_fires_at_holman.html). Officials from Holman declined to comment about the current state of affairs at the prison when reached by VICE News on Saturday afternoon.

In video footage posted online, inmates could be seen roaming through the prison at will. "It's going down in this bitch," one inmate said in a video that was posted to Facebook. The footage showed a small fire being tended by another inmate waving what appears to be a makeshift sword.

Post (<https://www.facebook.com/100010569930102/videos/203755543320109/>) by Friday, 11 March 2016 (<https://www.facebook.com/100010569930102/videos/203755543320109/>).

Several other inmates took to social media while the riots were going on, with some imploring the public to help rescue them.

Post (<https://www.facebook.com/LylEastSyde62/posts/1747561005472385>) by Friday, 11 March 2016 (<https://www.facebook.com/LylEastSyde62/posts/1747561005472385>).

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A similar riot erupted at the prison in 2011 after an altercation between a guard and an inmate over a contraband cell phone. Inmates took control of an entire dorm and refused to comply with a team of corrections officers that arrived in riot gear.

Holman, like many other prisons in Alabama, is chronically overcrowded. According to a 2006 documentary series called LockUp, the institution is known among inmates as "The Slaughterhouse," the "House of Pain," and the "Slaughter Pen of the South" because of the frequent stabbings that occur there. Last April, a 67-year-old inmate named Lawrence Utley was fatally stabbed at Holman.

Alabama's correctional facilities are designed to house a total of 13,318 inmates, but, according to the state's most recent data, there were 24,770 prisoners locked up as of January 2015.

Related: [How Private Prisons Are Profiting From Locking Up US Immigrants](#) 

In 2014, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and the Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program filed (<https://www.splcenter.org/news/2014/06/10/investigation-finds-alabama-prison-system-violates-federal-law-fails-provide-adequate>) a federal lawsuit against the Alabama Department of Corrections for consistent failure to address the medical and mental health needs of its inmate population, as well as discrimination against prisoners with disabilities.

A damning SPLC report (<https://www.splcenter.org/20140604/cruel-confinement-abuse-discrimination-and-death-within-alabama%E2%80%99s-prisons>) assessed the various ways in which inmates were being mistreated in Alabama prisons, and discovered that untreated hepatitis C is a rampant problem. Only four out of the 2,144 prisoners with hepatitis C were found to be

receiving treatment. A prisoner at Holman died from complications of hepatitis C after not receiving treatment, while other reports out of Holman said several untreated inmates became jaundiced as their livers started to fail due to progression of the disease.

The report also found that Alabama prisons were woefully ill equipped to treat mental health problems, and had just a fraction of the recommended number of psychologists on staff.

Follow Tess Owen on Twitter: @misstessowen (<https://twitter.com/misstessowen>)

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Tbernicker · 11 days ago

I loved the season of Lockup they shot at Holman. Is that badass black guy still the warden? I wonder if that snake dude was part of the riot or if they finally let him move to a prison closer to his moms house? Did any cats get hurt? So many questions. MSNBC needs to get a camera crew back there ASAP

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Fklahoma** → Tbernicker · 11 days ago

That show is great, the majority of it is available on Youtube.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Tom · 12 days ago

The other day I saw a program about the elderly in prison. One guy was 100 years old and yes, has a life sentence. He's missing a leg and can't get out of bed and is costing the "system" about \$100G per year. A menace to society no doubt, he could be the next Dillinger. Don't shoot G-man! There were other's in their 60's, 70's and 80's. Reaganism at it's most draconian. Have one joint - life without parole. Parking violation? LIFE WITHOUT PAROLE. With over 2,000,000 now behind bars under the Reagan More Prisons, More Guards, More discipline. Sure there are those who need to be there. The MORE, MORE, MORE is as effective as the "Just Say No" program or the empty words "Mr Gorbachev tear down this wall" Someone may have "Just said no". "The Wall" phrase did nothing. The policy is STUPID!

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Bullseye · 12 days ago

"A large contingent of Holman inmates are serving life without parole" I'll never understand this concept.. it would be exceptionally cheaper to just shoot them and save the tax payers the money of keep those wasted lives going. There's no benefit to anyone keeping them in a cage for a life sentence.

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Kent → Bullseye · 12 days ago

Say that to the 337 less far that have been released by the Innocence Project. I know you assoiate the missing empathy gene mutation with being manly. With this mutation comes the psychological need for the black and white. The need for order, structure, closure, certainty, consistency, simplicity, and familiarity.

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Bullseye → Kent · 12 days ago

Don't get me wrong, there are people that end up with life sentences who most assuredly do not deserve them or aren't even guilty to begin with - but instances where guilt is way way beyond any doubt, say for instance hypothetically some guy killed a bunch of kids and it's on camera and seen by witnesses - are people like that worth keeping alive for decades at the cost of the tax payer? Not to mention issues like prison overcrowding and private interests in prisons turning the entire thing into a s\$%t show.

Point being is there are people in prison we'd be better off simply removing from the equation all together. I would be highly surprised if you disagreed with that.

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Anon → Bullseye · 10 days ago

If your concern is based on the tax burden than you should be for criminal justice reform. Violent crime in the United States has been on the decline for the last 25 years and yet the number of people in the prison system has tripled (approximately) in the same amount of time. Most people in jail/prison are there for nonviolent drug offenses. This is due to the disastrous drug laws that our country so vigorously enforces. Only 10% of inmates in this country are serving life sentences so any reform you propose that targets this population is only going to have a limited effect.

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Bullseye → Anon · 10 days ago

I am for criminal justice reform. There are a lot of people who shouldn't be in prison, either because their crimes aren't significant to begin with - or they're so significant that keeping them alive for 25+ years is an absurd waste of money. Needless to say there's a much better way for the justice system to be managed than it currently is.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Anon → Bullseye · 7 days ago

I agree that keeping people locked away for the rest of their lives doesn't feel like a good idea. I would like to see more resources put towards training and education for inmates. We basically have a huge body of people who's best years are being wasted. They could be a huge resource if used properly. We're in the internet age so I'm sure that there's something that someone can do to be productive even if they can't leave the prison grounds.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



charlie → Bullseye · 12 days ago

The guy who killed a bunch of kids on camera is obviously going to death row anyways. Which still makes your first post sound like you think people should all be shot once given life.

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Bullseye → charlie · 12 days ago

Depends on the state, doesn't it? Capital punishment doesn't exist in each and every state.

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charlie → Bullseye · 11 days ago

Fair enough. Considering the drug war is the main issue with the criminal justice system, maybe reform should start there.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

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