



# Last Days of Solitary



In 2011, Maine State Prison launched a pioneering reform program to scale back its use of solitary confinement. Bafta and Emmy-winning film-maker Dan Edge and his co-director Lauren Mucciolo were given unprecedented access to the solitary unit – and filmed there for more than three years. The result is an extraordinary and harrowing portrait of life in solitary – and a unique document of a radical and risky experiment to reform a prison. The US is the world leader in solitary confinement. More than 80,000 American prisoners live in isolation, some have been there for years, even decades. Solitary is proven to cause mental illness, it is expensive, and it is condemned by many as torture. And yet for decades, it has been one of the central planks of the American criminal justice system.

Last Days of Solitary is a very disturbing film about the use of solitary confinement in the American prison service, as a form of control and punishment, and attempts in Maine to reduce the use of segregation over a three-year period. There is every reason to think – and watching this film will surely back up any statistical evidence – that people who are exposed to solitary confinement end up more psychopathic than those who are socialized in the normal prison system. The film itself is a shocking indictment of the use of solitary, or segregation, which shows people being literally driven out of their minds by the isolation and torture of being on lock-down for 23 hours a day.

Interestingly enough – and it is a pity the film didn't spend more time on this – the idea behind solitary was first put forward by Quakers, who believed that when a man was left to himself and his God, he would see the error of his ways, and reform would be the natural outcome. The film shows some truly shocking scenes of prisoners banging the arms, legs and heads against windows and walls in an attempt to get released from the daily torture, and follows several inmates on their journey, some through rehabilitation, some back into society, and some back once more into prison. I must say this is a tough watch, but anyone concerned about human rights should watch it, as it shows once more how the things, we currently do in attempts of reform of character fail miserably, and predictably. The film should also be seen in tandem with experiments with meditation in prison, like doing Vipassana, which again brings the prisoner face to face with himself, but in a healing and liberating setting, not in a punishing environment.

# Vocabulary:

## Last Days of Solitary

**Illness:** Enfermedad

**Quakers:** Miembro de una sociedad religiosa

**Scale back:** Reducir

**Harrowing:** Angustioso(a)

**Planks:** Bases

**Indictment:** Acusación

**Put forward:** Proponer/presentar