



## The Marion Experiment: Long-Term Solitary Confinement and the Supermax Movement

**Stephen C. Richards, Editor**

Southern Illinois University Press (January 2015)

Softcover \$39.50 (344pp)

978-0-8093-3376-9

*These stories—in a sober, effective way—show how the US experiment in draconian justice has been a complete failure.*

Spoiler alert. The answer to the implied question in the title *The Marion Experiment: Long-Term Solitary Confinement & the Supermax Movement*, is “no.” No, it did not work. In fact, the “experiment” begun back in 1983 in a Marion, Illinois, federal prison that subjected prisoners to permanent solitary confinement is such a horrible failure that not only does it amount to torture, it fails to keep prisoners and society safe. This collection of essays written by a combination of prisoners, former and current, along with academics studying the issue, and edited by Stephen C. Richards, an academician who himself is a former prisoner, should serve as a call to end the failed experiment of draconian punishment in the United States.

The overriding question of the effectiveness of solitary in preventing crime posed by *The Marion Experiment* cannot be answered by one author alone. It requires responding in many voices, which this collection does in a complete, sober, effective manner. Many of these stories are written by well-spoken individuals who have been tortured by the system. Some are still in prison, so their willingness to write, and face possible reprisals, is especially courageous.

A hypermasculine culture among guards ensures that juveniles are routinely beaten and further charges are added when they put up a defense, writes one essayist, describing a juvenile supermax facility. For women, many of whom have been abused by men before arrival in solitary, there is no privacy. “Seg is literally torture,” one female inmate says, using another word for solitary. “Just imagine being locked in a backed-up public toilet for a few days with strangers who randomly come and go.” Lesbian and transgender prisoners are kept in solitary longer than anybody else “for their protection.”

Criminal justice reform is gaining traction this year, with people of all political stripes admitting that the “tough-on-crime” laws of the past generation has resulted in broken communities, shattered lives and families, and our streets no safer. *The Marion Experiment* is a tough but necessary lesson in how not to fight crime.

HOWARD LOVY (Summer 2015)

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