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KPFA Presents “Ending Isolation” – A Raw Public Conversation on the Harms of Solitary Confinement

Thursday, September 4 | Hosted by Cat Brooks | Berkeley, CA

EVENTS: Ending Solitary Confinement A Public Conversation with Chris Blackwell, Prof. Deborah Zalesne, and Dr. Terry Kupers (authors of Ending Isolation: The Case Against Solitary Confinement, Pluto Press 2025) and Dorsey Nunn (author of What Kind of Bird Can't Fly?: A Memoir of Resilience and Resurrection, Heyday Press 2024). Angela Y. Davis will make a remote appearance to speak on the topic. The conversation will be hosted by Cat Brooks, Host of KPFA's Law and Disorder. The public conversation is combined with the launch of the nationwide Journey to Justice Bus Tour. Visit the bus and explore its interactive exhibits at the event!

WHEN: Thursday, September 4, Bus and its displays and exhibits open for viewing at 6 PM Doors Open at 6:30 PM Public Conversation begins at 7:30 PM

WHERE: St. John's Presbyterian Church, 2727 College Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94705

Sponsored by KPFA, Unlock the Box, and Look2Justice.

Prison authorities claim solitary confinement is necessary to control violence and gang activity, but research shows it not only fails to reduce violence, it often makes it worse. More than 120,000 people are currently held in solitary in the U.S., where they endure extreme isolation that causes profound and lasting psychological and physical harm. Human rights experts and social justice advocates agree: solitary confinement is a form of torture.

I.C.E. has a horrible history of overutilizing solitary confinement, resulting in an unacceptably high number of suicides. With Congress funding I.C.E. to detain ever more immigrants in their newly constructed massive detention facilities, the human damage grows geometrically. Meanwhile, social activism and legislative campaigns to outlaw solitary confinement, enjoying great success around the country, need to grow even more robust to counter the current trend toward a police state.

Angela Y. Davis, reflecting on Ending Isolation, writes: “For virtually the entire history of the prison, incarcerated people and their allies have sought to end solitary confinement, a punishment as desperately flawed as the institution that spawned it. These compelling reflections by people who have been entrapped within the tortures of solitary, and by those who bring them lifelines from the outside, should rekindle our abolitionist impulses at an especially critical moment in our history.”

The conversation between Chris Blackwell, Prof. Deborah Zalesne, Dr. Terry Kupers, and Dorsey Nunn, hosted by Cat Brooks, will explore the history of solitary confinement in U.S. prisons, the severe harm solitary causes, the path toward its abolition, and the centrality of ending isolation to the struggle for social justice.

The Journey to Justice bus will be parked at the event and open to attendees. The bus is a mobile advocacy hub, offering education and community building. Inside, Virtual Reality and immersive digital experiences illustrate the harsh realities of solitary confinement, while outside, a model solitary cell and photo exhibit humanize the statistics. It's a space for connection, featuring a mobile library and a creative zone for sharing stories and fostering solidarity.

FEATURED SPEAKERS:

Christopher Blackwell is an award-winning journalist currently serving a 45-year prison sentence in Washington State for taking a human life during a drug robbery. He was incarcerated for the first time at the age of 12. He is the co-founder and Executive Director of Look2Justice. Chris has published well over 100 essays and articles in major outlets including the New York Times and Washington Post. He writes a monthly newsletter for the Appeal. He was awarded the Galaxy Leader Fellowship in 2024 with his wife, Dr. Chelsea Moore, and was awarded the 2024 Incarcerated Journalist of the Year award by Prison Journalism Project.

Deborah Zalesne is Professor of Law at the City University of New York School of Law. With Christopher Blackwell, she founded and runs a Writers Development Program that supports incarcerated writers. Deborah has published extensively in the areas of criminal justice, race and gender justice, and legal pedagogy. She has authored or co-authored three books and over 40 scholarly articles.

Terry A. Kupers is a psychiatrist and Professor Emeritus at the Wright Institute in Berkeley, California. His research highlights the detrimental effects of solitary confinement on mental health and the inadequacy of mental health treatment behind bars. He testifies as an expert witness in class action litigation and is the recipient of the 2024 Judge Stephen S. Goss Lifetime Achievement Award. His books include Prison Madness and Solitary: The Inside Story of Supermax Isolation.

Dorsey Nunn is a formerly incarcerated leader and the longtime Executive Director of Legal Services for Prisoners with Children. He founded the advocacy arm All of Us or None and received the 2023 James Irvine Foundation Leadership Award. He is the author of What Kind of Bird Can't Fly?

Cat Brooks is a community organizer, director, playwright, and actress. She is the host of KPFA's Law & Disorder and Executive Director of the Anti Police-Terror Project. She was a key figure in the fight for justice for Oscar Grant and the runner-up in Oakland's 2018 mayoral election.

ADMISSION: \$20 with a sliding scale so nobody is excluded. Tickets available at [Eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com) by searching "Ending Solitary Confinement" and at kpfa.org/events.