

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2011/08/16/new-from-solitary-watch-original-videos-on-solitary-confinement/>

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close

Search

close

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | August 16, 2011

Today marks the launch of a [Solitary Watch video channel on YouTube](#). The channel will feature original video interviews with former prisoners, family members, and advocates, as well as a collection of other videos on solitary confinement. We begin with three short video interviews shot by Valeria Monfrini, a student at Corcoran College of Art + Design who is completing an internship as a reporter and videographer at Solitary Watch.

Bonnie Kerness, whose wealth of hands-on involvement with prisoners held in solitary has inspired and informed so much of the movement against prison isolation, comes out of the civil rights movement. As she describes it, Since 1975, I have been a human rights advocate on behalf of prisoners throughout the country. Currently, I coordinate the Prison Watch Project for the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). Kerness works out of the AFSC office in Newark, and on a June day this year, she shared her own analysis before introducing us to two people who experienced solitary confinement firsthand.

[youtube=http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_V_q5UG5qbU]

Munirah El-Bomani spent time in New Jersey womens prisons in the late 1990s. She landed in solitary, she says, because she stood up for herself and was branded a troublemaker. Today she fights for a living as a street vendor and civil rights activist in Newark. More than a decade after her release, she remains haunted by her prison experiences, and by the fear of going back.

[youtube=http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jut8hLI0ZVk]

Ojore Lutalo was imprisoned in 1982 on an armed robbery conviction, and released in 2009. He spent the majority of his 26 years behind bars in isolation because of his associations with the Anarchist Black Cross Federation and Black Liberation Army. For much of this time, he was in the Management Control Unit at Trenton State Prison. The MCU, one of the earliest units of its kind, was known for using solitary confinement to isolate prisoners who held unsavory political beliefs or sought to organize other inmates. Here Lutalo describes his time in solitary, including an incident in 2005, when he was summarily thrown into what the prisoners call the boom-boom room formally referred to as mental health unit 1-C, where I was not allowed to shower, change my clothing, have soap, toothpaste, toothbrush, washcloth or towel. I was not allowed to make telephone calls, send out or receive personal or legal mail. I was also not allowed to receive personal or legal visits or take part in any inside or outside recreational activities. Lutalo also guides viewers through his artwork, which he says helped him remain sane and strong while inside.

[youtube=http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljB00Jg-n6M]



James Ridgeway (1936-2021) was the founder and co-director of Solitary Watch. An investigative journalist for over 60 years, he served as Washington Correspondent for the Village Voice and Mother Jones, reporting domestically on subjects ranging from electoral politics to corporate malfeasance to the rise of the racist far-right, and abroad from Central America, Northern Ireland, Eastern Europe, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia. Earlier, he wrote for The New Republic and Ramparts, and his work appeared in dozens of other publications. He was the co-director of two films and author of 20 books, including a forthcoming posthumous edition of his groundbreaking 1991 work on the far right, Blood in the Face. Jean Casella is the director of Solitary Watch. She has also published work in The Guardian, The Nation, and Mother Jones, and is co-editor of the book Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement. She has received a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship. She tweets @solitarywatch.

Accurate information and authentic storytelling can serve as powerful antidotes to ignorance and injustice. We have helped generate public awareness, mainstream media attention, and informed policymaking on what was once an invisible domestic human rights crisis.

Only with your support can we continue this groundbreaking work, shining light into the darkest corners of the U.S. criminal punishment system.

by [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

Solitary Watch encourages comments and welcomes a range of ideas, opinions, debates, and respectful disagreement. We do not allow name-calling, bullying, cursing, or personal attacks of any kind. Any embedded links should be to information relevant to the conversation. Comments that violate these guidelines will be removed, and repeat offenders will be blocked. Thank you for your cooperation.

JEAN, will you be able to obtain videos of those mentally ill prisoners who are in solitary confinement as well?

Diana, I wish we could. It is virtually impossible for journalists to interview anyone in solitary, much less film them. All we can do is interview those fortunate enough to be out in the free world.

oh ya i may be in ny but i worth the trip ben study solitary be for i was a adult trust me when i say you can find anything on the web but how to treat shu sindrum and yes i a good frend of the man who coined the term grassian help me understand the effefts i met him i hope to be like him grate men are wothy of following and grassian is more then worthy of this and more i know he be glad if you had me on your show DR. G is like close to me thare are day i wish i was older just so i could be his secont wife but i setel for following his lead and ending solitary or die trying may thare be light in the darknes of justice

ok first thing i got to say cool and i want on the show i love to be one of your storyes that you have on it like i love if you talk to me and share my story with the web it would mean a lot to me to be on your youtube show not only am i a strong just say hell no to solitary i have felt what it can do to you more then i ever wanted to i would be honored if you chose to have me on your show oh ya and summit shock ny is closeing oct 1 my reson for being to end solitary at all cost may thare be light in the darknes of justice

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