

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2019/04/09/14-journalists-awarded-grants-from-the-solitary-confinement-reporting-project/>

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Half of the Inaugural Round of Grants Support Work by Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Journalists

by [Jean Casella](#) | April 9, 2019

WASHINGTON, DC, April 9—Solitary Watch today announced the recipients of the first grants awarded by the **Solitary Confinement Reporting Project**. The new grants program, which is **funded by the Vital Projects Fund and administered by Solitary Watch**, will fund 14 projects in a variety of media that examine the use of solitary confinement across the U.S. carceral landscape, from prisons and jails to immigrant and juvenile detention facilities.

The recipients range from award-winning veteran journalists to emerging young reporters, and include six incarcerated writers as well as one recently released from prison.

The journalists who have experienced solitary firsthand plan to report on previously untouched subjects from the Kafkaesque scene of a review hearing where people are condemned to remain in solitary; to the underground economies that endure in a world of extreme isolation and deprivation; to the ways in which prison rules and punishments serve to undermine, rather than maintain, safety and order.

Reporters on the outside will investigate the use of solitary at facilities that have received little or no prior attention; and will explore the challenges of re-entry and recovery after solitary, especially for those also contending with psychiatric disabilities or with the legacy of enduring isolation as children.

The 14 projects were chosen from dozens of submissions by the team of **Wilbert Rideau**, a renowned prison journalist who edited *The Angolite* and received the George Polk, Sidney Hillman, and Robert F. Kennedy Awards, and **James Ridgeway**, an investigative reporter for 60 years and now co-director of Solitary Watch.

Ridgeway described why support for independent reporting is especially important when it comes to solitary confinement:

The tens of thousands of people in this country who live in small concrete cages, many for months and years, are shut off from the outside world, he said. Stories of the brutality and misery that is solitary confinement have finally begun to emerge, but we still have a long way to go to fully inform and engage the American public on this subject.

Rideau, who entered the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola at the age of 19 and was released 44 years later as an award-winning journalist, explained the fundamental need to support reporting that originates behind bars:

No matter how knowledgeable one is about the institution of prison, it is only the incarcerated or formerly imprisoned journalist who can take the public into the very heart of the prison experience, he said. No one else can provide this vital perspective on solitary confinement, our most extreme and cruel punishment—not scholars, not outside reporters, and not prison authorities. The voice of the experienced is absolutely necessary.

Solitary Watch (solitarywatch.org), which administered the grant program, is a national watchdog group that investigates, reports on, and disseminates information about solitary confinement in the United States. In its ten-year history, it has helped bring the issue into the public consciousness, the mainstream media, and public policy-making.

Today, a powerful body of evidence as to the psychological, physical, and social harms caused by isolation, as well as a growing national movement to end long-term solitary, have spurred incremental reforms in a number of prison systems. Yet available data indicates that at least 80,000 people remain in solitary confinement on an average day in U.S. prisons and jails, and many people on the outside remain uninformed or misinformed on the subject.

Solitary confinement is a critical human rights issue that every American needs to address, since these places are being run in the name of public safety, said James Ridgeway. We are glad that, through the generosity of the Vital Projects Fund, we are able to support an outstanding group of journalists on both sides of the prison walls as they tell the truth about this hidden hell.

David Menschel, who directs the Vital Projects Fund, said: For more than a century we have known that solitary confinement is torturous. It is only because it is hidden from public view and done to human beings we see as less than human that we countenance such hideous immorality done in our name. Vital Projects Fund is proud to support these grants that seek to lance the boil of solitary confinement and expose it to the light and air of human conscience.

A list of grant recipients follows.

For more information, contact: Jean Casella, jcasella@solitarywatch.org, 917-974-0529

Solitary Confinement Reporting Project 2019 Grant Recipients

Roshan Abraham, freelance journalist, New York City: the long-term mental health effects of solitary confinement on people released from Rikers Island

Matthew A., incarcerated journalist, New York: the alternative economy in a solitary confinement unit

Jeremiah Bourgeois, incarcerated journalist, Washington State: how prison rules drive people into solitary, and alternatives to solitary for maintaining safety and order

Kelly Davis, freelance journalist, San Diego: warehousing people with mental illness in solitary in California's jails

Rene Feltz, Democracy Now!/freelance journalist, New York City: a multimedia investigation of solitary confinement and resistance in immigration detention

Susan Greene, The Colorado Independent, Denver: an in-depth investigation of the widespread use of solitary use in privately run immigration detention facilities

Juan Moreno Haines, San Quentin News, California: solitary as punishment for getting sick

Kenneth Hartman, freelance journalist, Santa Monica: re-entry for solitary survivors in Los Angeles and the Bay Area

Elizabeth Hawes, incarcerated journalist, Minnesota: the experiences of women in solitary confinement, with a focus on Native women

Daryl Khan and Clarissa Sosin, freelance journalists, New York City: the ongoing placement of children in solitary in Pennsylvania jails and the story of one survivor

Arthur Longworth, incarcerated journalist, Washington State: how to survive supermax confinement

Lance Tapley, freelance journalist, Augusta, Maine: conditions of confinement for people with mental illness

Andrew Urevig, freelance journalist, Minnesota: solitary confinement as retaliation for organized resistance in Minnesota prisons

Thomas Whitaker, incarcerated journalist, Texas: the illusion of solitary confinement reform in the state of Texas

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Banner photo: Swintec typewriter with clear plastic case, the only typewriter incarcerated people are permitted to possess in many prison systems.

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 [Solitary Confinement Reporting Project](#)

February 24, 2022

by [Solitary Confinement Reporting Project](#)

February 8, 2021

by [Solitary Confinement Reporting Project](#)

January 28, 2021

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