

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/07/31/afsc-releases-survivors-manual-by-and-for-prisoners-in-solitary-confinement/>

Campaign and Advocacy

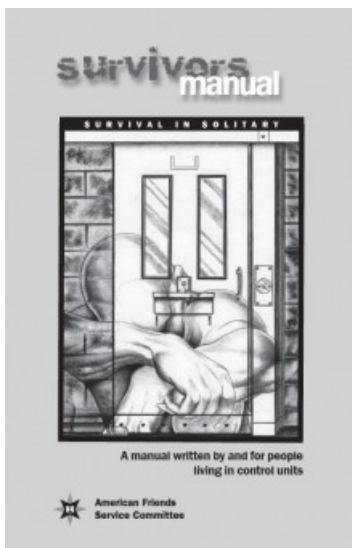
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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | July 31, 2012



The American Friends Service Committee has put out a new edition of the vital publication *Survivors Manual: Surviving in Solitary A Manual Written By and For People Living in Control Units*. The volume is a collection of letters, stories, poetry, and practical advice on surviving solitary confinement in prisons. AFSC released the following announcement last week:

Solitary confinement, characterized by 23-hour a day lockout with minimal exercise and lack of human contact, affects an estimated 100,000 prisoners in federal and state prisons in almost every state. Thus the need for *Survivors Manual*, which was first issued in 1998, is even more vital.

The isolation of solitary confinement is torture according to the United Nations Convention Against Torture. The extended use of solitary severely affects all prisoners' mental health, making re-entry to society all the more difficult. For those with pre-existing mental conditions, such consequences are even worse, says Bonnie Kerness, Prison Watch Coordinator for AFSC.

In this powerful collection of voices from solitary, people currently or formerly held in isolation vividly describe their conditions and their daily lives. They also write about how they struggle to keep mind, body, and soul together in an environment that is designed to break them down. Many also analyze the political, economic, and social forces that shape their torturous situation. The collection also includes some stunning artwork and poetry.

A PDF of the manual is available online at the following link: <http://www.afsc.org/document/survivors-manual-surviving-solitary>. Copies can also be purchased for \$3 each at the following site: http://www.quakerbooks.org/survivors_manual.php.

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.

Also from The Lessons of Marion Page 24:

Letter to Friends Service Committee from Thomas Silverstein sometime between 1983 and 1985.

True I killed a guard, but no one has ever bothered to ask why. They only slammed me in my own prison, go out of their way to make it as tough as possible in the name of security and justice and now what? I never thought of killing anything before I came to prison or H-Unit (Control Unit at Marion). Although I was sent to H-Unit behind a murder in Leavenworth, it has been reversed because the rat who said it was me later confessed he lied to get a transfer to a sweeter joint so he could escape, which he succeeded in doing. So I entered H-Unit with a life sentence I didn't deserve and I am mad about it. It has been a nightmare ever since.

I'd like to see a better way for all, because murder isn't pretty in any language or moral sense. I am also an example of how prisons avoid dealing with their own backyards. Not only hasn't anyone ever bothered to rap with me, they don't want to deal with it so they have locked me up indefinitely. They have turned Marion into a concentration camp, hurting innocent men and their families with their so-called get tough policies. Which is what got me where I am today. Not all dogs put their tail between their legs when their masters beat them constantly. Some eventually bite back. Men, especially innocent men going through hell for no reason than being subjected to others overpowering vindictiveness and paranoia will also bite back. So how many more bodies will fall and how many more individual special housing units like mine, before they face up to the jobs they get paid well for? More bars and guards are hardly the answer, because I am a living example what the cage and that way of thinking causes.

I guess no one that mattered read it.

Given the history of censorship of the BOP I doubt that this manual will pass through the legal channels of a high security level prison. Copies will most likely reach inmates through underground means and such copies will most likely be used against those who are found with them to place them in the hole as a threat.

The manual mentions an earlier one which I found contained these sections.

The Lessons of Marion.

<http://afsc.org/sites/afsc.civicaactions.net/files/documents/LessonsofMarion1985.pdf>

Page 6-13:

- 1) The Rise and Fall of the Prisoners Rights Movement
- 2) The Civil Rights and Anti-War Movements
- 3) The Rise of the Black Muslims
- 4) Community Support
- 5) The Rise of the Law and Order Climate
- 6) Economic Decline
- 7) Racism
- 8) Decline of the Prisoner Support Movement
- 9) The Criminal Justice System Responds
- 10) Increase in Incarceration
- 11) Prison Construction
- 12) Increased Length of Confinement
- 13) Isolating the Dangerous Offender

The chronology of events gives us a clue as to how the system reacts to rights movements.

It is important to know the history in order to be able to anticipate your opponents reaction and be prepared to confront it.

Great manual I have a question and not sure where to go with it. I support Tommy as everyone knows is the longest held isolated Federal prisoner anything written referring to an inmate ex inmate living or dead is rejected by the censors. After 3 decades this is not a

publication he needs my question regarding other prisoners Inmate is one of the PC bullsh*t terms probably couldnt have this either is anyone aware of rules for sending this?

Is it just the discretion of the individual prison?

Thank you I ask because the manual is full of names.

As we both know there is all kinds of censorship regarding what people in prison are not allowed to read. But I know this manual does make it through to many on the inside so it just depends on the policies of the prison system and the individual prison. Ill pass this information on to AFSC and see if they have any more specific information.

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Solitary Watch News