

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2019/03/27/photo-requests-from-solitary-comes-to-the-brooklyn-public-library/>

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close

Search

close

close

Show Previews Tonight at Event with Albert Woodfox; Full Exhibition Opening on April 23

by [Jean Casella](#) | March 27, 2019

*Press Release from the Brooklyn Public Library*

**Shedding Light on the Interior Lives of Men and Women Held in Solitary Confinement Across the U.S.**

**Special Events Feature *Solitary* Author Albert Woodfox, *New Yorker* Writer Jelani Cobb, and *The Wire* Actor Michael K. Williams**

**On View April 20 July 1, 2019, at Central Library on Grand Army Plaza**

March 26, 2019 (Brooklyn, NY) **Brooklyn Public Library (BPL)**, in partnership with **Solitary Watch**, will present [\*Photo Requests from Solitary\*](#) (PRFS), a participatory art project that offers audiences a direct and powerful connection to people living in solitary confinement in U.S. jails and prisons, on view at BPL's Central Branch from **April 20 to July 1, 2019**. Extending the exploration of critical issues around human rights and mass incarceration raised in *Photo Requests from Solitary*, Brooklyn Public Library will hold public talks throughout Spring 2019 as part of the *Freedom Index* series, including *Solitary* author **Albert Woodfox**, *New Yorker* staff writer **Jelani Cobb**, and *The Wire* actor **Michael K. Williams**. The exhibition and related talks are part of Brooklyn Public Library's thought-provoking Spring season of cultural programming, bringing together illustrious writers, critics, and artists with the Brooklyn and greater New York communities to discover new perspectives, draw creative inspiration, and participate in today's most urgent conversations.

*Photo Requests from Solitary* invites men and women held in long-term isolation in U.S. prisons to request a photograph of anything at all, real or imagined. Their requests are then filled by artists and volunteers who create the images according to the written specifications, forming an artistic collaboration that transcends prison walls. From whimsical to anguished, the images created through *Photo Requests from Solitary* form an archive of the interests, memories, and daily thoughts of just a few of the 80,000 people who live in extreme isolation on any given day in U.S. prisons and jails.

Brooklyn Public Library will host the first New York exhibition featuring photos and requests from all five states where PRFS has worked. Viewers at BPL are encouraged to fulfill open requests and will also have the opportunity to learn about the campaign to end long-term solitary confinement in New York's prisons and jails. The site-specific installation of requests and the photographs created from them will be located in the Grand Lobby and second floor balcony of BPL's Central Library.

On March 27, ahead of the official exhibition opening, Brooklyn Public Library will host a conversation between **Albert Woodfox** and **Jelani Cobb** on Woodfox's memoir, *Solitary*, which chronicles his 44 years in solitary confinement for a crime he did not commit. Their conversation will also include a one-night preview of select images from the exhibition.

*Photo Requests from Solitary* will open to the public on April 20, with an opening reception taking place on April 23. At the reception, **The Wire** actor **Michael K. Williams** will present [\*Raised in the System\*](#), a documentary examining mass incarceration of youth in the United States and the first episode of the new season of HBO's news-magazine series *Vice*. Drawing on Williams' personal and family experiences at the hands of the criminal justice system, the film also looks at the community members and organizations working on solutions to keep young kids out of the prison pipeline.

BPL will also host a panel discussion focused on the role art can play in campaigns to end mass incarceration featuring artists and activists with direct experience of incarceration. Details of the panel discussion will be announced.

*Photo Requests from Solitary* and the corresponding public conversations around mass incarceration further the Library's role as a vibrant space for discussions of significant civic issues. The exhibition and programming build on BPL's history of addressing this critical topic, previously explored through exhibitions including *The House that Herman Built* (2013), a project by Jackie Sumell with Herman Wallace, who along with Albert Woodfox and Robert Hillary King made up the so-called Angola Three, a group of former Black

Panthers who were held in solitary confinement in Louisiana for decades. BPL is committed to providing access to educational, economic, and cultural enrichment opportunities of the highest quality to the 2.6 million individuals who make Brooklyn home, offering nearly 65,000 free programs a year and resources that support personal advancement, build civic engagement, and strengthen the fabric of community.

The exhibition of *Photo Requests from Solitary* at the Brooklyn Public Library is supported by a grant from the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation.

For additional information on the exhibition and other events in the *Freedom Index* series, please visit:

<https://www.bklynlibrary.org/exhibitions/photo-requests-solitary>

To learn more and explore volunteer opportunities with *Photo Requests from Solitary*, please visit: <http://photorequestsfromsolitary.org/>

### **About Brooklyn Public Library**

Brooklyn Public Library is the nation's sixth-largest library system and among the boroughs most democratic civic institutions. We offer 65,000 free programs a year for people from all walks of life: immigrants learning a new language, students preparing for college, older adults seeking companionship, aspiring entrepreneurs launching their dreams, children discovering the world, and people of all ages exploring arts and culture. And we provide patrons 3.9 million opportunities to enjoy one of life's greatest satisfactions: the discovery of a good book. Learn more at [bklynlibrary.org](http://bklynlibrary.org)

### **About *Photo Requests from Solitary* and Solitary Watch**

*Photo Requests from Solitary* is currently led by Laurie Jo Reynolds, Jeanine Oleson, and Jean Casella, and is a project of Solitary Watch, a national watchdog group that has helped spark public attention, mainstream media coverage, and policymaking around the issue of solitary confinement. The project was started in 2009 by [Tamms Year Ten](#), a grassroots campaign to close Tamms Correctional Center, the notorious supermax prison in Illinois. In 2013 the year Tamms was shuttered PRFS became a collaboration with Solitary Watch and expanded to California and New York, where PRFS has partnered with the [Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement](#) in advocacy efforts across the state, including the push to pass the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act. Last year, PRFS launched a site-specific installation in Philadelphia's [Eastern State Penitentiary](#) focusing on prisoners in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and a [website](#) that invites the public to browse open requests and create and upload images.

WE WILL MAKE A  
PHOTOGRAPH FOR YOU

Name: Oscar K. [REDACTED]  
Date: 2/13/14

Would you like to request one? Yes, thank you.

If so, fill out this form and describe a photograph you personally would like to receive.  
A volunteer will make a photograph based on your description below.

You may request a photograph of anything (that is not prohibited by prison rules, of course).  
In the space below, please describe what you would like to see in your photograph. (You could describe a person, place, object, scene or idea.)

I would please like to see in the photograph: a "Rottweiler" puppy, or  
"California Pit Bull" sitting in front of his dog house.  
With the name (Rudy) above the entrance to his dog  
house.

PELICAN BAY STATE PRISON  
SECURITY HOUSING UNIT  
UNIT D-8

Do you have any specific instructions for the photographer?

That it be up close & detailed please. Thank you.

Organizations working to end the use of solitary confinement may use your photograph or request for purposes of public education, media use or fundraising. If so, we could use your name or you could remain anonymous. Yes.

If you would like us to use your name, what name should we use?

Oscar Rudy [REDACTED]

SEND YOUR RESPONSES TO: Photo Requests from Solitary  
172 5th Avenue, #16  
Brooklyn, NY 11217

PARSONS THE NEW SCHOOL FOR DESIGN • SOLITARY WATCH  
TAMMS YEAR TEN • NATIONAL RELIGIOUS CAMPAIGN AGAINST TORTURE

WE WILL MAKE A  
PHOTOGRAPH FOR YOU

Name: Keith  
Date: December 2, 2013

Would you like to request one?

If so, fill out this form and describe a photograph you personally would like to receive.  
A volunteer will make a photograph based on your description below.

You may request a photograph of anything (that is not prohibited by prison rules, of course).  
In the space below, please describe what you would like to see in your photograph. (You could describe a person, place, object, scene or idea.)

Kids eating in a fast food joint like (eg, McDonalds)  
Smiling; Feeling Hungry and having a great time,  
OR Just a Table full of Fast food  
(eg, Fries, Burgers, a Shake or Soda, Pie, etc.)

Do you have any specific instructions for the photographer?

Organizations working to end the use of solitary confinement may use your photograph or request for purposes of public education, media use or fundraising. If so, we could use your name or you could remain anonymous.

If you would like us to use your name, what name should we use?

My name is Keith

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**WE WILL MAKE A  
PHOTOGRAPH FOR YOU**

Name: Sonny

Date: March 9, 2014

**Would you like to request one?**

If so, fill out this form and describe a photograph you personally would like to receive.  
A volunteer will make a photograph based on your description below.

You may request a photograph of anything (that is not prohibited by prison rules, of course).  
In the space below, please describe what you would like to see in your photograph. (You could describe a person, place, object, scene or idea.)

A face-shot of a woman with a smile that shines as bright as the  
sun. Not a model type but an everyday ordinary woman who, perhaps,  
enjoys every moment of life. Who is not bias or judgemental towards  
anyone but full of love & compassion for everyone & everything.

**Do you have any specific instructions for the photographer?**

The photograph should capture the essence of love for humanity and  
the woman should be looking into the camera, not away.

Organizations working to end the use of solitary confinement may use your photograph or request for purposes of public education, media use or fundraising. If so, we could use your name or you could remain anonymous.

If you would like us to use your name, what name should we use?

My real name (top) or Sonny Boy my childhood name given by grandma.

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WE WILL MAKE A  
PHOTOGRAPH FOR YOU

Name: Hershel D. [REDACTED]

Date: July 20, 2013

Would you like to request one?

If so, fill out this form and describe a photograph you personally would like to receive. A volunteer will make a photograph based on your description below.

You may request a photograph of anything (that is not prohibited by prison rules, of course). In the space below, please describe what you would like to see in your photograph. (You could describe a person, place, object, scene or idea.)

I would like to have a painting of the outdoors, maybe  
a wooded scene, with maybe a doe and twin fawns

Do you have any specific instructions for the photographer?

Anything would be appreciated. I have been locked away since  
1983.

Organizations working to end the use of solitary confinement may use your photograph or request for purposes of public education, media use or fundraising. If so, we could use your name or you could remain anonymous.

If you would like us to use your name, what name should we use?

Hershel Douglas [REDACTED]

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To view all 221 requests, visit [photorequestsfromsolitary.org](http://photorequestsfromsolitary.org).

Banner: *Holy Sights in Jerusalem*. Photo by Dan Golub for Michael (PA).

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 [Valerie Kiebala](#)

June 13, 2019

by [Jean Casella](#)

April 30, 2018

by [Victoria Law](#)

September 19, 2017

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.

P.O. Box 11374  
Washington, DC 20008

[info@solitarywatch.org](mailto:info@solitarywatch.org)

Solitary Watch

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