

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2016/02/04/now-available-our-new-book-the-first-collection-of-voices-from-solitary-confinement/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | February 4, 2016

UPDATE UPCOMING BOOK EVENTS:

After a standing-room-only launch at the Open Society Foundations in New York on March 15, we are planning several more book events/readings in the coming months. Stay tuned for future updates.

Wednesday, April 13, 6-8 pm: Launch Event and Reading at Busboys & Poets, 14th and V Streets, Washington, DC. [Click here for details](#).

Wednesday, April 20, 7-9 pm: Reading and Panel Discussion with Center for Constitutional Rights and Others at Downtown Community Television (DCTV), 87 Lafayette Street, New York, NY. Details to be announced.

Thursday, June 9, 6-7 pm: Reading by Sarah Shourd at Book Passage, 1 Ferry Building, San Francisco, CA.

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Dear Readers and Supporters:

This week marks the official publication date of *Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement*. Edited by Jean Casella, James Ridgeway, and Sarah Shourd, *Hell Is a Very Small Place* is the first-ever trade book on solitary confinement, and the only book to feature firsthand accounts of life in solitary. It is now available in bookstores and online (see links below).

Our publisher, The New Press, had this to say about the book in a press release:

President Barack Obama, Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, and Pope Francis have all criticized the widespread use of solitary confinement in prisons and jails. UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Juan E. Mndez has denounced the use of solitary beyond fifteen days as a form of cruel and degrading treatment that often rises to the level of torture. Yet the United States holds more than eighty thousand people in isolation on any given day. Now, sixteen authors vividly describe the realities of life in solitary.

In a book that will add a startling new dimension to the debates around human rights and prison reform, formerly and currently incarcerated men and women describe the devastating effects of solitary confinement on their minds and bodies, the solidarity expressed between individuals who live side by side for years without ever meeting one another face to face, the ever-present specters of madness and suicide, and the struggle to maintain hope and humanity.

These firsthand accounts are supplemented by the writing of noted experts, exploring the psychological, legal, ethical, and political dimensions of solitary confinement, and a comprehensive introduction by Solitary Watch's James Ridgeway and Jean Casella. Sarah Shourd, herself a survivor of more than a year of solitary confinement, writes eloquently in a preface about an experience that changed her life. The powerful cover art is by renowned political artist Molly Crabapple.

Advance reviews for the book have been strong. [Kirkus](#) called *Hell Is a Very Small Place* a potent cry of anguish from men and women buried way down in the hole, and [Publishers Weekly](#) called it a no-holds-barred expose filled with stories that pack a visceral punch and make a convincing case for more humane conditions, better oversight, and continuing prison reform.

The book is already generating press coverage. [The New Yorker](#) featured *Hell Is a Very Small Place* in a moving piece by Jennifer Gonnerman about the work of James Ridgeway and Solitary Watch specifically, his long history of correspondence with people in solitary, which yielded many of the pieces in the book. [Slate](#) produced a video about book contributor Five Mualimm-ak and his journey home from solitary.

Stay tuned on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) and on the [Our New Book](#) page on this site for more coverage and reviews, as well as upcoming book events still in development.

Leading advocates have also praised *Hell Is a Very Small Place*:

An extraordinary collection of testimonials from men and women who have endured solitary confinement and, unlike many others, survived. . . . *Hell is a Very Small Place* probes the darkest corners of a prison system where, all too often, the urge to punish has prevailed over law, morality, and human decency. DAVID C. FATHI, Director, ACLU National Prison Project

A devastating look in the mirror for a society that has hidden the depths of its cruelty behind concrete and steel. *Hell is a Very Small Place* puts us face with the smells, the sounds, and the profound despair of solitary confinement, and is a call to moral outrage, repentance, and action.

REV. LAURA MARKLE DOWNTON, Director of U.S. Policy, National Religious Campaign Against Torture

This important book leaves no doubt that solitary confinement has no place in a civilized society. The story of each person subject to solitary shows that he or she is somebody and that the life that is thrown away is not beyond redemption. Together they demonstrate the urgency of turning from hatred to understanding and from vengeance to reconciliation if we are doing to have a decent, moral and compassionate society. STEPHEN BRIGHT, President and Senior Counsel, Southern Center for Human Rights

Confronts the moral catastrophe of solitary confinement through compelling and courageous testimonies by the worlds premier experts on the matter: the confined themselves. GLENN E. MARTIN, Founder and President, Just Leadership USA

We will never achieve justice in this country until we have the courage to look unblinkingly into the hidden corners of our system of mass incarceration, where men and women are locked away and forgotten stored like meat in a freezer. This book does just that. VAN JONES, author of *Rebuild the Dream*

Please take the time to read these haunting voices of people in solitary, along with experts and activists. It is vitally important. RALPH NADER

For those of you who made generous donations to our year-end Lifelines to Solitary fundraiser with the promise of the book as a thank-you gift: Your books are now on their way! For others, the book is available in local bookstores, and at the links below:



[Order now from The New Press.](#)

[Order now from Indie Bound.](#)

[Order now from Amazon Hardcover](#) or [eBook](#)

We have dedicated this book to those who find the courage to break the silence, and to those too shattered to do so. We are honored to be able to serve as a conduit to these brave and powerful voices, and we hope our book will help them reach into the hearts and minds of thousands of new readers. Please help us spread the word.

With best regards,

Jean
Jim

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.

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.

I just ordered the book and put it out over my social media and will also add this post to my blog as a link. This past year I've been hard at work writing a book on Jamie Cummings' life and his hardships inside. He's still in ad seg. Keeping his head above water has been a challenge. I have posted some first draft chapters to build up the mailing list and create interest. I think I'm halfway done before I get it to an editor. This link is music I write and poetry to go at the beginning. I have actually written quite a bit of music I like to include with the book inside the back cover. I've seen that done once before.

Most of all congrats on the book. I wish you all the success you deserve for the work you have done.

<https://mynameisjamie.net/2016/03/14/inside-the-forbidden-outside-poetry-and-music/>

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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