

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2011/12/12/beyond-guantanamo-theres-long-term-solitary-confinement-in-u-s-prisons/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | December 12, 2011

While it never uses the term solitary confinement, the front-page story in yesterdays *New York Times* titled [Beyond Guantnamo, a Web of Prisons for Terrorism Inmates](#) is in effect a survey of long-term solitary at the federal level.

The article describes an archipelago of federal prisons that stretches across the country, hidden away on back roads. Today, it houses far more men convicted in terrorism cases than the shrunken population of the prison in Cuba that has generated so much debate. They serve long sentences, often in restrictive, Muslim-majority units, under intensive monitoring by prison officers. Their world is spare.

The article focuses on three prisons: the notorious ADX federal supermax in Florence, Colorado, and the two Communications Management Units in Marion, Illinois, and Terre Haute, Indiana. They hold the majority of the 362 federal prisoners convicted in terrorism-related cases, along with several hundred others, and they have made an art out of isolation so to say that the prisoners world is spare is an understatement. So is the assertion that the federal Bureau of Prisons is resistant to outside scrutiny of these secretive solitary confinement units.

Both the Obama administration and Republicans in Congress often cite the threat of homegrown terrorism. But the Bureau of Prisons has proven remarkably resistant to outside scrutiny of the inmates it houses, who might offer a unique window on the problem.

In 2009, a group of scholars proposed interviewing people imprisoned in terrorism cases about how they took that path. The Department of Homeland Security approved the proposal and offered financing. But the Bureau of Prisons refused to grant access, saying the project would require too much staff time.

There's a huge national debate about how dangerous these people are, said Gary LaFree, director of a national terrorism study center at the University of Maryland, who was lead author of the proposal. I just think, as a citizen, somebody ought to be studying this.

The Bureau of Prisons would not make any officials available for an interview with The New York Times, and wardens at three prisons refused to permit a reporter to visit inmates. But e-mails and letters from inmates give a rare, if narrow, look at their hidden world.

The article's author, Scott Shane, corresponded with several current and former inmates, which is virtually the only way for the press and the public to obtain any information about these fortresses of solitude. But the article is short on detail about the extreme deprivations and lack of due process faced by residents of the facilities it profiles. For a more thorough portrait, see our article on ADX, [here](#), or one of several excellent pieces on the CMUs, [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

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.

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now you see what i ben saying for years now that the bop is besides the serpreem court i say the bop is at least the secont moest powerful group of goverment now sher i spell badly but i no morron i am no fool to what is being done you wish to know how to bring to bop doun besides messing with thare tek you must do like the cops do in prisons go undercover you must befriend the bop make them think your on thare side gane there love trust and get as close to the iner ring as you can if abel in the ring even then while you study them all over the year or time you are thare you must at the time they are weekest or least think you would shine the light on them as the old saying gos hit them where it hurts like they did in rome the last person you think would stab you is who you need to look out for moest of all short way wipe sentry but that going to fare less your looking to end up in thare care as well you think i nuts speeking of everquests plane of justice like are usa but thats what being done they are building the walls of justice round us all the bop are the sentrys of justice the warden they run daly life of the prisons the us serpreem court is the tribunal and sadly one in justice geting out is harder to be a prisoner of justice is to be a ward of the court in meny ways and to be that is to not be free thare is so much this nashion will not look at but that is what needs to be seen we pay for the bop to run in part we should have the right to see what they do and for those who need it may thare be light in the darknes of justice

If the people in these prisons are from terror-sponsoring states & enemies of the U.S., then they get what they have coming to them. I do not, & I cannot, feel any compassion for enemy combatants. Let them rot & die in these institutions..

If, on the other hand, they are natural-born American citizens & are being kept in these places for punishment to crimes theyve committed, or disciplinary reasons, then thats different. I have read that there are levels of confinement in these places, but it is still solitary confinement. I believe that if someone is so dangerous to the lives & safety of others in prison that theres 0 alternative to his being kept like this, then be it so. I dont believe, from what Ive read, that all inmates in SuperMax are so dangerous that no contact w/other humans has to be the deal. I think that there should be some level of confinement where some work detail can be performed, & some time for contact w/other inmates can be had as well, where the inmate is working his way back to regular population where he came from, or to another institution. Solitary confinement should not be the order of the day except for the most unusual or extreme case of disciplinary infraction, such as a murder committed while serving timethat HAS to be dealt with severely, swiftly & decisively.

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