

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | May 17, 2011

Herman Wallace and Albert Woodfox have entered their 40th year in solitary confinement in the Louisiana prison system. A [series of events](#) in New Orleans last month marked the 39th anniversary of their placement in solitary, following the murder of Angola prison guard Brent Miller for which Wallace and Woodfox were later convicted on [highly dubious evidence](#). The third member of the Angola 3, Robert King, was convicted of a separate prison murder, and released after 29 years in solitary when his conviction was overturned.

King was among the 39 people who paid homage to Wallace and Woodfox's four-decade ordeal by spending one hour inside a 6 x 9-foot replica cell, constructed by artist Jackie Sumell. The [anniversary events](#), which took place at the headquarters of the organization [Resurrection After Exoneration](#) in New Orleans. Other events included the screening of the film [In the Land of the Free](#), in which Brent Miller's widow, Teenie Vernet, expresses her belief that her husband's killers have not yet been caught. Of Wallace and Woodfox she says: If they did not do it and I believe they didn't they have been living a nightmare.

The three men believe they were originally targeted because they were Black Panthers, organizing against conditions at Angola, and Wallace and Woodfox believe they remain in solitary for the same reason. In a 2008 deposition, Angola Warden Burl Cain said Woodfox wants to demonstrate. He wants to organize. He wants to be defiant. He is still trying to practice Black Pantherism, and I still would not want him walking around my prison because he would organize the young new inmates. I would have me all kind of problems, more than I could stand, and I would have the blacks chasing after them.

Wallace and Woodfox were recently separated from the prison that made them famous and from one another and moved separately to other maximum security prisons. Wallace is now in the Hunt Correctional Center, down the river in St. Gabriel, while Woodfox is in the Wade Correctional Center in Homer, in the far northwest reaches of the state. Both remain in Closed Cell Restricted housing, or round-the-clock solitary confinement, with brief excursions for showers and solitary exercise in a dog pen. Woodfox is now in his mid-60s, and Wallace is nearing 70. Both depend upon mail to relieve their isolation; they can be reached at the following addresses:

Herman Wallace

#76759

Elayn Hunt Correctional Center

CCR D #11

PO Box 174

St Gabriel, LA 70776

Albert Woodfox

#72148

David Wade Correctional Center, N1A

670 Bell Hill Rd.

Homer, LA 71040

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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

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I could not think what it be like to do that much time in solitary no one should have to suffer like this I to honor the men for their strong souls and will to fight may they one day see the light of freedom may there be light in the darkness of justice

This is another sad example of the systems fear of those that speak out. I am just now beginning to discover the origins of that fear even though the events which instilled this fear took place at least partly while I was incarcerated.

I have sat in a four man cell not much larger than the one depicted above while confined in Baton Rouge's segregated Parrish Jail in 1969-1970 and listened to older convicts describe the abuses they received in the southern prison farms such as Angola, Parchman (MS), and Sugarland (TX).

I learned about inmates being beaten by a five inch wide heavy straps while tied naked to a slab of concrete, of isolation units exposed to extreme temperatures, of the long hours toiling on the plantations in the heat and humidity along with snakes while fighting off swarms of mosquitoes. I was told how the guards especially liked to target Yankees or Californians like myself for abuse.

These inmates claimed that the guards saw in Californians the roots to the challenges to their authority. The roots of insurrection and defiance were in their minds coming from organizations like the BPP. In fact the BPP was only the tip of a spear. The tip is attached to a shaft and that shaft was comprised of radical white organizations grouped together under the title of The New Left. The Weathermen, Venceremos and the Symbionese Liberation army are just a few organizations mentioned in a fascinating book called The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement by Eric Cummins. This alliance was a symbolic target for law enforcement down south and across the country. Although I was neither a radical nor a communist I was from California. And I was involved in counterculture activities such as drug use and back then a joint could get you 25 yrs in Angola.

Now I was unaware of how these guards developed these phobias but I learned from Cummins book that the prison movements rise in California coincided with a rash of murders of prison guards. And the murder of this guard in Angola occurred at the height of this alarming trend.

As a former prisoner I share the disappointment of the author that the less radical Prisoner Union was overlooked by the left for their fantastical hopes of a communist revolution headed by prisoners such as George Jackson, and Eldridge Cleaver.

In an earlier article on SW you mentioned the heavy promotion of bible study as a tool for rehabilitation. It is alarming that the authorities are trapped in a failed approach from this same time period which is also covered in this book rather than address the legitimate complaints of the prisoners.

The present conditions are the result of the over reaction to the prison movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s when the system first encouraged prisoners to read select literature with a Christian theme and then to repent. It didn't take long for the prisoners to learn to play the game and have the more articulate inmates manipulate the system to attempt to gain their freedom.

This brought on the prison movement and the excesses of that movement brought the draconian conditions of the present.

Please read it for yourself along with Soul on Ice by Eldridge Cleaver and George Jackson's Blood in My Eye since Cummins references them throughout the book.

As for these two men at the very least they should be placed in a seniors prison free of the torture of isolation. That is if they find it something that they could handle after so many years alone. I noted that Silverstein was now uncomfortable around people but willing to work through his phobia. Give all of these old men a break they have suffered way too long.

Warden Cain continues in his fear of a 60s-style racial uprising I hold great admiration for anyone, guilty or innocent, who can mentally survive years of solitary The irony is that there is every indication that a fake conversion to Jesus would elevate these guys to poster boys in the Cain religious mutiny

Cain is afraid. He is so afraid that he is denying human rights to these former and now fangless Black Panthers In truth, he fears transparency and seeks step n fetchit black prisoners so that he may continue his Jim Crow regime All this from a man whose religion

teaches, Perfect love casts out fear.

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