Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

https://solitarywatch.org/2013/06/26/solitary-survivor-sarah-shourd-joins-sw-to-produce-play-featuring-voices-from-solitary-confinement/

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by Jean Casella and James Ridgeway | June 26, 2013

Sarah Shourd has joined Solitary Watch as a contributing editor and director of an innovative theater project based on the experiences of people in solitary confinement in the United States. Sarah, who spent more than a year in solitary confinement in an Iranian prison after being detained while hiking in Iraq near the border,has been an advocate for American prisoners in solitary since her release.At Solitary Watch, she willcreate and present a play titled *Opening the Box.* In Sarahs words:

For this project I will draw from my own experience as an author, a journalist and the 410 days I spent in solitary confinement while held as a political hostage by the Iranian government from 2009-2010. My goal is to portray real stories with truthfulness, dignity and complexity and also to make the experience of watching this play as visceral as possible.

I want the audience to breathe along with a young man having a panic attack after being denied a visit with his mother, to crawl inside the skin of an immigrant detainee terrified of being deported and to travel with a lifer on a magic carpet of memoryonly to be pulled back into the stark, implacable reality of the hole. By hearing these stories, my hope is that the audience will be able to relate to the men and women enduring this torture in our prisons, to their pain but also to their resistance to the dehumanizing forces around them, their incredible resilienceand their refusal to be institutionalized.

Once the play is written well move to stage productionenlisting well-known actors and survivors to perform in cities across the country. Our strategy is not just to perform the playin each city we visit we will meet with local politicians, prison officials, activists, survivors and their families. Everywhere we go, we will provide our audience with ways to stay involved, act on what theyve seen and contribute to nation-wide efforts to end this practice in our prisons for good.

Sarah will begin by corresponding with people on the inside, gathering the stories of their lives and their experiences in solitary confinement and using these stories to create the script.Tosupport this initial phase of the project, she has launched a Crowdrise fundraising campaign, which features the following video:

We welcome Sarah, her powerful voice, and her creative endeavor to Solitary Watch.

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 Jean Casella

December 29, 2021

by Jean Casella

December 23, 2021

by Events and Announcements

December 3, 2021

Solitary Watch encouragescomments 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. Commentsthat violate these guidelines will be removed, and repeat offenders will be blocked. Thank you for your cooperation.

Who tells the story of the original crimes done to those who (quite often) find themselves caged from the effects of the awful crimes committed against their ancestors?

Those who refuse to consider this, live ignorant of the obvious realities: the ever-present effects of racial privilege/hatred/profiling/supremecy.

That aside, NOTHING justifies torturing people, especially tax-payer supported, state sanctioned torture

I see this project as being capable of opening minds, hearts and eyes. How can I contact Ms. Shroud?

How do you tell the story of the victims of our crimes. (I say our crimes as an ex-convict.) Your talking real human interest, leaving out the part, where most of the people and I mean most 90% have brutally victimized persons; how do you propose to talk about their suffering. and what answer to the problem of punishment for crimes done are you going to provide, what alternative are you going to put forth in answer to the corrections problem? I would love to know

Im what you might describe as a victim. I have forgiven to the max. Not found god, lost him really but forgiveness SET ME FREE!! + i love my friend who remains in the shoe. Xxx

this will be an important project to both humanize the people and expose the terrible cruelty that prisoners in solitary face. I hope that you will include the voices of the US political prisoners many of whom for over 40 years have been in solitary confinement.
I myself was in small group isolation, total isolation and maximum security conditions for over 11 years and was one of the first women political prisoners to be in such conditions.
My book An American Radical details this experience as well as some of the counterinsurgent strategies of the US government. I wrote the book because I think that for the most part people in the US dont believe that the outrageous things that go in American prisons really do, nor do they have an understanding that this goes on in their name.
The voices of Sekou Odinga, Herman Wallace, Mumia Abu Jamal, Tom Manning, Herman Bell, Oscar Lopez, the prisoners in the CMUs for the most part either Muslims or prisoners from the newer movements for radical change and justice- it is these voices that need to come to the fore because they are the ones who most understand what is being done to them and why it is being done, and that they have kept the flame of light and humanity alive in an otherwise very very dark and dreadful place.

Thank you for taking this up.

This is an important project to humanize and make real the terrible horrendous damage to our humanity that solitary confinement causes. I would hope that some particular attention be paid to the specific political prisoners several of whom have spent years in isolation in one form or another.
I myself spent 11 years in small group isolation or in total isolation or in maximum security conditions. This project can also help the prisoners movement by helping develope an analysis of why solitary is growing as a form of punishment.
Herman Wallace, Sekou Odinga, Mutulu Shakur , Oscar Lopez ,Tom Manning, the prisoners in the cmus (most of whom are Muslim or politically motivated), and many others will need to be a voice in this great work. It is they who have kept the truth lit in the terrible darkness of American prison cells.

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