

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/06/27/the-torture-of-isolation-gains-media-attention/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | June 27, 2012

The Torture of Isolation is the title of [a post on Andrew Sullivan's hugely popular blog](#) The Dish, at the *Daily Beast*. The post features a new video from Reason TV, a project of the libertarian foundation that also publishes [Reason magazine](#). Reason's editor-in-chief Nick Gillespie interviews SWs James Ridgeway on solitary confinement in U.S. prisons and jails.

[youtube=http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YyqCiCSdFOY]

Also referenced in Sullivan's post is a new piece by *Time* magazine's legal columnist Adam Cohen, titled [Its Time to End Solitary Confinement in U.S. Prisons](#), one of many editorial, op-eds, and articles that follow up on the historic June 19 Senate hearing on solitary. Cohen writes:

Solitary confinement takes a brutal toll on anyone subjected to it often pushing them past the breaking point. At last week's congressional hearing, one former inmate who was released from a Texas prison in 2010 after being exonerated said that solitary confinement is by its design driving men insane. About [half](#) of suicides and a disproportionate amount of cases of self-mutilation [occur](#) among inmates in solitary. It is not just modern sensibilities that are offended by the cruelty of solitary confinement. Charles Dickens called it a dreadful punishment and declared it mentally torturous in ways that none but the sufferers themselves can fathom, and which no man has a right to inflict upon his fellow creatures.

Rather than reserving solitary confinement for the most vicious, unrepentant criminals, American prisons dole it out in heaping portions and often for no good reason. Some inmates are put in solitary confinement for repeated violations of minor prison rules. There was a report at the congressional hearing of a prisoner who was caught with 17 packs of cigarettes and given 15 days for each pack, or eight months. Worse still: many inmates are put in solitary not because they have done anything wrong, but for their own protection. This includes victims of in-prison attacks and sexual assaults, gay inmates and children.

Adding to the numbers: the 1990s boom in Supermax prisons, which were built to house inmates in solitary confinement. One 2005 [study](#) found that 40 states were operating Supermax, or similar-styled, prisons, which held 25,000 inmates. But many ordinary prisons also place inmates in solitary generally at the unchecked discretion of corrections officials.

Also see the latest batch of strongly worded editorials opposing the use and abuse of solitary confinement, not only in the [New York Times](#), but also in smaller papers like the [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#), [Pittsburgh Post-Gazette](#), and [Toledo Blade](#). Or Google solitary confinement Senate hearing to view the widespread coverage this event received. And consider that just two years ago, it was highly rare to see any mention of this issue outside of Solitary Watch's tribute to the prisoners, advocates, and grassroots activists who have made solitary confinement in America increasingly impossible to ignore.

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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Everyone has an opinion but how would you feel if your close family member were murdered in cold blood take this test pick someone you talk to every day who you share a bond with and don't talk to them for one month you can't do it y cause they're apart of you so imagine not being able to talk for ten yrs..

@Rose, this verse caused me to think back and reverse my thinking as I was haunted with how I spent my 25 years as a correctional officer, supervisor and administrator knowing that we need to treat human beings humane and with dignity. This is the verse that took my conscience aside and whispered to me: it is time to tell the truth; it is time to reveal what you know and what you have seen. Thus here I am..

Where is our news coverage local and state ? Why are they not covering this ?

I am ready to put a bumper sticker on my car and have been writing on the back of my outgoing stamped mail , solitary watch's web site.

Isolation is painful, the depression treatment commercials on TV. Well, What about our prisoners? this is cruel and inhuman treatment.

@Joy the only media coverage is for foreigners if u r born here seems the Constitution means nothing where's Amnesty International? the ACLU? or the celebrities?

The other verse concerning prisoners is Matthew 25: The Bible in many places refers to those in bonds. When I pass SW's articles along they are ignored I printed out Tommy Silverstein's story and mailed it to various people What pisses me off is everyone says Don't break the law Well I'm not against prison just torture. People don't get it until it personally touches them. Sorry ccarl but if I got my wish All those working in these places torturing people would be hunted down like Nazi War criminals just doing their job I don't believe it where does it say if you are to work here make sure you don't take them out for Rec spit in their cold food etc etc Criminal and cruel.

@Rose! perfect verse! and this news is an answer to my prayers Thank God.

Hebrews 13:3

Common English Bible (CEB)

Remember prisoners as if you were in prison with them, and people who are mistreated as if you were in their place.

The practice has been in place for centuries the exposure is just now beginning to break through the other side of darkness. In time, the light will reveal the truth of what is happening inside our prisons and found to be a violation of the 8th Amendment as more cases will illustrate the detrimental effects of solitary confinement..

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