

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2013/03/30/thirty-days-in-solitary/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | March 30, 2013

Solitary confinement is in the news on a daily basis nowadays, though just a few years ago it was a rarity to find any mention of it outside of Solitary Watch. What follows is a roundup of noteworthy stories that came out in the past month but didn't make it into our posts. We will be running these roundups once a week from now on.

PRI radio reports that at Guantanamo, the [Hunger Strike Grows As Despair Sets In](#) and interviews one of the few reporters who have been inside Gitmo since the strike began.

Al Jazeera presents a documentary and roundtable discussion on [The Ethics of Solitary Confinement](#).

From Citizen Radios Marc Kilstein, a [powerful hour-long radio documentary](#) on the history and practice of solitary confinement.

A bill introduced in [Massachusetts](#) aims to limit time in solitary confinement in the states prisons and jails. So does a similar bill in [Nevada](#).

Ted Koppel, on NBC's *Rock Center*, reports on the [Criminal justice systems dark secret: Teenagers in solitary confinement](#).

The *Toronto Globe and Mail* reports that [solitary confinement is on the rise in Canadian prisons](#).

The *Atlantic's* Andrew Cohen writes, [Enough Is Enough Time for the Feds to Investigate Prison Abuse](#) especially prisoners with mental illness held in solitary confinement in federal prisons.

Individuals with mental illness are [held in solitary confinement in strip cells](#) at a Virginia jail.

Chris Hedges writes about solitary confinement (and about the inspiring Bonnie Kerness and Ojore Lutalo) in [The Shame of Americas Gulags](#).

Despite opposition, Arizona plans to build [500 more supermax prison beds](#).

New York Advocacy groups, survivors of solitary, and families of the incarcerated unite to form the [Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement](#) in New York's prisons and jails.

The sister of a man imprisoned at Pelican Bay writes of [her brothers 23 years in solitary confinement](#), calling it beyond cruel and unusual.

The ACLU and other advocacy groups testify on solitary confinement before the [Inter-American Commission on Human Rights](#).

Courthouse News Service reports that a [scathing study on solitary confinement in Illinois](#) was buried amid local politics.

A Maryland family says that their son, who suffers from autism and mental illness, has been [held in solitary confinement for four years](#), and denied visits and phone calls for two.

More than 100 men imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay [launch a hunger strike](#) to protest conditions at the camp and the hopelessness of their situation.

The ACLU releases a comprehensive and inspiring report on [solitary confinement reform in the state of Maine](#).

The New York Civil Liberties Union files a civil rights lawsuit on behalf of people in solitary in New York State prisons became a [class action suit](#).

[Solitary Confinement: Punishment Or Cruelty?](#), a segment on NPR, traces the history and current controversies. (Can't it be both?)

Advocates from the New York City Jails Action Committee protest recent [increases in solitary confinement and brutality](#) on Rikers Island.

Representatives of the men in Pelican Bays Security Housing Units send an [Open Letter to the California State Legislature](#).

[Death at Dawson: Why Is Texas Worst State Jail Still Open?](#), from the *Texas Observer*, tells the story of a woman who gave birth prematurely in a holding cell, and was sent to solitary on a suicide watch when her infant died.

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

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.

Nice to see another Alan on board that I communicate with These folks have done a wonderful job Far better than our own site It is so hard to get dedicated volunteers and money is so very tight I was just communication to Allen T about organizing and Invited him to my home here in New London CT, and to do one of my TV shows, I hope he takes me up on that. Also I would love to see more ex-offenders talking and sharing even if it gets heavy; it is good to get ideas out and I happen to believe it is the only way real change will come about (Thank you for putting this site together) I believe the more we have the greater our chance for Change NARCT has been wonderful for us here in New England, Bobby Dellelo represents us with them and effected their direction and what they have put forth. We love those folks, because they listen to us that have been there (Again great and wonderful work here)

I agree the founders of SW deserve a shout out. And at least two other ex-cons have written on here. Mike Jewel and the one that works with Mills. But it would still be useful to have more step up.

It has been amazing to watch the change in public discussion of solitary confinement over the last few years.

Solitary Watch was a voice in the wilderness, crying for attention to a national scandal that no one knew about. Now, Solitary Watch can't even keep up with the reports in mainstream media, let alone all the work being done on the ground.

Thank you Solitary Watch for being there when no one else was.

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@Russ

A powerful testament!

You and Allen should write a post on here from the view point of ex-cons with nothing to gain from telling your story. I imagine many people are skeptical when it comes from those still held in the hole. Take old Billy Blakes story as an example.

I think I am the only ex-con that has written on here that has done any time in the hole and my experience is nada (nothing) compared to what others have done and are still doing.

Our message as a prisoner and ex-prisoner has not changed in 50 years; we know what should be done to institute a just system and what is Key:
Empowering Prisoners

People who support the prison movement still need to understand what selfhelp and selfdetermination are, because these are the basic philosophies we operate under. They simply mean that prisoners are helped by prisoners. And organizations concerned with prisoners should be run by and for prisoners.

Russ Carmichael, NEPA News, April/May 1975

It seems strange to me that convicts or exconvicts are never consulted about prison matters, nor even considered for consultation, when they are what prison is all about and the only true professional.

Robin E. Riggs, The Outlaw, March/April 1975

I think the prison leadership has to come from the people suffering from the serious plight of prison. There are many people in our ghettos thruout the country who are in minimum security type prisons where the walls are not visible. I think that a lot of people can support our movement, but I do definitely believe that the movement must be initiated by the people who are oppressed the most by those particular possibilities or plights.

Arnold Coles, NEPA News, April/May 1975

A national priority was discussed. The most obvious one came outconvicts speaking for themselves; not sociologists, counselors, administrators, etc., but convicts. The most important national priority is the convict voice in their own destiny.

Stephanie Riegel, The National Prisoner Union Conference, The Outlaw, June/July 1975

Last spring when the guards went out on strike, the prisoners ran Walpole for nine weeks. Aside from the day to day running of the prison, including the kitchen, educational and vocational programs, prison industries and daily counts, the prisoners took care of their own internal problems. There were no rapes or killings.

The movie 3,000 Years and Life was filmed at this time. It shows Jerry explaining how wrongdoers are corrected by persuasion and embarrassment in front of peers. He said that if one con steals from another, the men tell him, Youre a pig. Just like the System. The brother gets embarrassed. Then the men say, Its no big deal, we know it wont happen again. Then they pat him on the back, give him a cigarette, and its over.

When the guards returned exactly a year ago today, as I write, Jerry and Bobby Dellelo were stripped, beaten, run naked across broken glass and thrown in the hole. The administration doesnt want the prisoners to exercise responsibility, but when the prisoners had the responsibility of running the prison, the prisoners virtually ended violence at Walpole, and generally ran the prison better than it had ever been run before.

Superintendant Vinzant has a different perspective on prisoner solidarity. All prisoner solidarity does is to foster disrespect, tension, and abuse between the prisoners and the guards .

Donna Parker, NEPA News, June 1974

Prisoners demands are no secret. Whether prisoners are bursting from their cages in anger and frustration or coolly presenting carefully drawn manifestos, their message is the same:

Allen T wrote a great description of Solitary on an a joining thread and the reasons why many prisoners confine themselves voluntarily; it appears he could write a book on the subject. For those who would look at the totally problems his insight if well worth reading Over my nearly fifty years in the prison change business it seems every time we think we are doing something positive we go backwards, very frustrating I finally became, what is deemed, a prison abolitionist, in the 1970s rather than an advocate reformer This changed happened in me after our Walpole failure in 1973 (ref: When the Prisoners Ran Walpole) like many that had worked diligently for change over many years; we found that the system as it stood looked and in our mind was hopeless to any real beneficial change; and this was at a time when we where emptying the prisons out and starting real programs for our people it was in that era we found a hopelessness. Then the Drug wars and the prison population exploded to many times what it was in the early and mid 1970; and we went seriously backward into our current mode of lock them up and throw away the key (give them no hope) It is our shame as a society..

While I dont doubt solitary confinement is cruel and unusual punishment in most cases. What if a prisoner request to be in solitary confinement and would prefer being there longer than 30 or even 3 months.

A movement such as this is impossible to ignore and defeat

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