

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2010/02/23/on-reality-tv-solitary-confinement-is-a-game/>

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by [Jean Casella](#) | February 23, 2010



[Man In Box](#) is a new British reality show, which started streaming live over the web a week ago. Tim Shaw, a DJ and TV presenter known for his [outrageous and sometimes offensive behavior](#), is spending 30 days in a steel box the size of a large refrigerator, under the gaze of a camera. The public receives clues as to the box's whereabouts, and whoever finds it gets 30,000 pounds (\$46,500).

While the number may be miniscule compared with U.S. figures, the UK does place inmates who present disciplinary problems including some who are mentally ill in [long-term lockdown](#). And the country has had its share of scandals involving places like ancient [Dartmoor Prison](#), where the chief prison inspector once found inmates living in conditions more appropriate for dangerous animals.

Despite this, the promoters of [Man In Box](#) don't hesitate to [call their stunt](#) an experiment that links solitary confinement with social networking. Observing how a human being behaves for a period of a month in a world of total isolation.



The British are not alone in making solitary confinement into a game show. In the United States, where up to 100,000 inmates may be in lockdown on any given day, the Fox Reality Channel debuted in 2006 with *Solitary*. Now in its fourth season, the show is promoted as an intense psychological experiment, in which contestants are confined to small pods, where they remain for up to 12 days. The one who sticks it out the longest wins a mere \$50,000. While in their pods, the subjects are commanded by a disembodied voice to perform tasks that sometimes meet the definitions of torture.

The [Boston Globe's Mark A. Perigard](#) called *Solitary* a cheap, depraved show that was torture for subjects and viewers, and asked, What, no waterboarding? Other than this, it gleaned little media attention or criticism, outside of one 2008 article in [Mother Jones](#), where Michael Mechanic wrote:

When *Solitary* was in development, Abu Ghraib was still a fresh wound, and they treaded carefully, nixing direct references to prisons, cells, inmates, and above all, the t-word. But hey, controversy sells. You want to get the tailwind of the whole cultural zeitgeist, [series creator Andrew] Golder says. We wanted people to be aware of us and think we were this scary torture is never a word we'd say but sort of very tough television show.

So on the Fox Reality channel, creating a TV show that echoes real-life, government-sponsored torture, is catching the tailwind of the whole cultural zeitgeist. This clever feat might not be appreciated, of course, by men who have spent up to 30 years in 6 x 9 cells.

In another strange twist to this story, the winner of America's first big reality TV show spent some time in actual solitary confinement. Last December the ACLU of Massachusetts [petitioned the court](#) on behalf of Richard Hatch, who won the first season of *Survivor* series in 2000. In 2006, Hatch was [convicted of tax evasion](#) for failing to report his \$1 million winnings, and served two years in prison before being released into home confinement. But Hatch was soon back inside and [briefly in solitary confinement](#) after giving unauthorized interviews to the press (which the ACLU argued violated his First Amendment rights).

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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Yes it is and for the record I CAN WIN IT HANDS DOUN no contest born in to solitary ben thouw it as a teen at least this time i would get payed lol hell yes if they wont a realy good game they pick me for it wish they would i would win it the trick in solitary is SLEEP not like it going hurt me more then it has lol at least this time i get cash so feel free to send it on to them bering it on cos no bodys will or could beet me at it i meen if it litaly is just being alone the longest hell hands down i going to win if it odd stuff and voteing out forget it then but if it a real test of solitary servival skill bring it lol

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