

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2020/12/11/how-do-you-report-on-what-happens-in-solitary-ask-the-people-who-live-there/>

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Your Donation Supports Our Groundbreaking Work with Incarcerated Journalists and Writers.

by [James Ridgeway](#) | December 11, 2020

Dear Readers, Supporters, and Friends:

The torture of solitary confinement is something that takes place not only behind closed doors, but behind layer upon layer of steel and concrete. It happens deep inside places that have been called prisons within prisons, which in the name of security are kept strictly off limits to all observers, including the press.

From the beginning, Solitary Watch has faced this challenge: **How is it possible to report accurately on what happens in places that have been deliberately shut off from outsiders?** Our answer has always been the same: **Ask the people who are already inside** the thousands of people forced to live for months and years within these gray boxes.

At Solitary Watch, people in solitary have always served not only as sources but as contributors, **writing their own accounts of life in the hole** for our [Voices from Solitary](#) series. And in the past few years, we have expanded our collaborations with writers behind bars.

In 2019, we offered **grants to incarcerated journalists** through our [Solitary Confinement Reporting Project](#). We supported their work in progress, and succeeded in getting it published in places like [The New Republic](#), [The Crime Report](#), and [The Appeal](#).

This year, we welcomed **our first incarcerated Contributing Writer**, Juan Moreno Haines, who is also a Senior Editor with the San Quentin News. As COVID-19 spread through the prison, Juan [continued to report](#) for us even when he contracted the virus and, like so many other sick people in prisons and jails, [was thrown in solitary confinement](#). Together with his colleague Kevin Sawyer, Juan also worked with us to run a mock presidential election inside San Quentin among men denied the right to vote, and published [a feature in The Guardian](#).

This coming year, **we plan to redouble our efforts by establishing a network of prison reporters across the country** who will expose what happens in the hidden world of solitary confinement through articles, podcasts, and social media posts. These incarcerated correspondents will include experienced prison journalists as well as talented newcomers who will be given a chance to develop their skills.

[PLEASE DONATE TO SUPPORT THIS WORK](#)

As the virus continues to decimate prisons, and the use of solitary confinement explodes in response, **the work of prison reporters is more important than ever.** And the people we've contacted so far are enthusiastic allies in the project. But this is an ambitious venture, and an expensive one for our small operation, since we plan to provide support with research, editing, and placing articles with a variety of publications, as well as pay stipends to the writers. **To make it happen, we need your help.** Your end-of-year donations are a crucial source of support for new, groundbreaking projects like this one. **If you value the voices we bring you from behind prison walls and inside solitary cells, please consider a gift to Solitary Watch.** If you give before the end of the year, **your donation will be doubled through the NewsMatch program.**

[DONATE TODAY, AND YOUR GIFT WILL BE DOUBLED](#)

On a personal note, I have been a journalist for more than fifty years. I consider my work with these incarcerated writers, who risk so much to bring the truth to light, to be among the most important and rewarding work I have ever done. I thank you for making it possible, and for helping us continue and grow this work in the future.

James Ridgeway

James Ridgeway (1936-2021) was 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.

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

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