

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2011/03/29/tolerating-torture/>

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | March 29, 2011

A noteworthy piece on solitary confinement appeared yesterday as a [guest column in the New Jersey Star-Ledger](#). The column is by George Hunsinger, who teaches at Princeton Theological Seminary and is the founder of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT). It is noteworthy, too, that NRCAT, which previously focused its work largely on U.S.-sanctioned torture abroad in the post-9/11 world, has now taken up the issue of [torture in U.S. prisons](#). Its [2011 agenda](#) includes, as one of seven major initiatives, a call on religious leaders and people of faith to advocate for the end of long-term solitary confinement in prisons.

Under the title Torture Here at Home Cannot Be Tolerated, Hunsinger begins with the case of accused Wikileaker Bradley Manning, now in his tenth month of solitary confinement in a military brig, and then writes of the tens of thousands of other Americans who live in similar conditions.

The conditions under which Manning is being held are deplorable. No individual, whatever crime he may have committed, should be held in prolonged isolation or be routinely shamed through the use of unnecessary forced nakedness. And that's the key point no prisoners should suffer cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment no matter who they are or what crime they may have committed.

I'm not qualified to speak for Bradley Manning. What I do know, however, is that there are thousands of prisoners throughout the country who face conditions that are similar to, or worse than, those Manning may be enduring. Unfortunately, however, those poor souls are almost completely ignored.

Many prisons contain units in which prisoners are held in isolation for prolonged periods of time (months or even years). The lack of human interaction is profoundly damaging to many of these prisoners; some suffer sufficiently to cause actual physical changes in the makeup of their brains.

Long-term solitary confinement is torture. It has been known to cause prisoners to go insane. And it is unnecessary. In many cases, prisoners are held in solitary confinement to punish them for minor infractions, because of the severe overcrowding of our prisons or other administrative reasons, or because they are mentally ill.

We need to think about what sort of people we want to be. Do we want to be a people who ignore torture that occurs here? Do we want to sit comfortably at home, knowing that somewhere not far away someone is being broken, his mind shattered, by a severe loneliness that has lasted for years?

It is one thing to punish a criminal. It is another to abuse him or her to strip away his very humanity by denying him contact with all other humans. Solitary confinement can cause permanent damage. And let us remember that under the law, Manning, an American citizen, is still innocent until proved guilty.

It is our urgent responsibility to create a prison system where there is no place for such enforced suffering and where the rights of all citizens are upheld.



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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well said this is what i have said for years we need more who think like you my friend you are the true light in the darkness of justice we have to be there sense a nation will not may there be a day when we do not have to be the light bearing but that we all will hold a light as one nation for humane justice till then we keep fighting may there be light in the darkness of justice

Where are all of the Chaplains?

The only one we have been blessed to study Dr. Stan Moody we are seeking funds to provide his profound books to our Veterans Incarcerated

And as we have requested before, any Veterans Incarcerated who received their combat disability (Dept of Defense/VA) prior to offense so many times such untreated PTSD/Traumatic Brain Injury/Survivors Guilt, etc., response for such offense

The War Widows

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