

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | October 16, 2010

Brandon Green is imprisoned in Uinta 1, a supermax unit at the Utah State Prison in Draper. His writings appear on a [blog](#) created for him by Utah Prison Watch. In this piece, he challenges readers to imagine what is like to live in solitary confinement, as he vividly describes the physical and psychological deterioration that take place in an isolation cell.

Go to your bathroom door and kick a hole in it. Now lock yourself in tight. Throw all your hygiene items, except a tooth brush and toothpaste tube, out the hole. Everything. Now go to your tub and flip it over. This is where you'll sleep. Now sit. The light switch disappears and the shower spigot. A little speaker replaces them. It listens and sometimes speaks to you. Laughs at you. Taunts you. Tells you your suffering is entertaining. You can't shut off the light with no switch and you'll have to shower using the sink.

As you sit, you hear ten or so voices outside the door. That's funny. Sounds like that guy who robbed my mother's house last year and put her in a wheelchair after brutally beating and raping her. It can't be! Is that the judge that let the man run free too? And his twisted attorney? Why are they here!?!

The worst enemies you could imagine, or put a face to, have just moved into your house. As you sit in the bathroom. These people only wish you harm of the utmost. And your death would be nothing but joy for them. All your food, and any mail you might be expecting, will have to come from these squatter enemies. Good luck!

To make matters worse, these enemies of yours control all your heating, air conditioning, water from your sink and to your toilet. And to top it off, if they see you sleeping they'll kick the door and yell at you. They laugh.

You can hear these men day and night right outside your door. You smell them barbecuing and smoking. You're hungry. You can hear these men torturing people. Sometimes other people in similar bathrooms next to yours are pulled out and placed in body bags. To the amusement of these squatters.

A day passes this way.

My god, you say, what have I done to deserve this?

A week passes.

You cry.

A month.

You attempt suicide but your vein closes up before death.

A year.

You are now talking to yourself and running around naked. You are convinced the food you seldom receive, that's halfway edible, is poisoned. As you eat the rotten meat your beard and mustache get in the way of the teeth chewing. You couldn't cry if your life depended on it. And it used to. But you've forgotten why.

Two years.

You can't remember. You've forgotten. Forgotten what? You don't know. The squatter enemies come around and you look at them. They look at you. They laugh. You start to laugh too. You forgot why. But you do.

Three years.

You sleep 20 hours a day. You can't help it. But your floor is clean. You keep it spotless. You don't know why. But you do. You're

skinny. You've lost an easy 60 lbs. Your skin is turning yellow and your legs cramp up and atrophy. You don't want to die anymore. Why bother? You'd rather sleep and dream. The dreams are so vivid. More real than these walls.

Five years.

You go home, you leave your bathroom, this year.

They tell you that. But why? Where do I go? I don't want to leave now. I like my tub and sink

Brandon Green welcomes mail from readers:

Brandon K. Green
#147075
Unit One 208
Utah State Prison
P.O. Box 250
Draper, UT 84020-0250



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 [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 30, 2022

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September 19, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 6, 2022

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i am not from this country, although i do live here now, and i am a little reluctant to comment on something i know little about. but i can say that what i have read on the site is just appalling. the way prisoners are treated in this country deprives the united states of the right to call itself civilised. i think you would have to go to yemen, or egypt or north korea to find similar cruelty. in europe such conditions are entirely unknown and if any country tried to impose them, prisoners would have the right to appeal to the european commission on human rights to stop that government. europe has a charter of human rights which makes treatment of prisoners such as this illegal. obviously no such rights exists here.

can i make a couple of suggestions about why it happens in the US, but as i say i stand ready to be corrected by people who know more than i do. In Europe there was, towards the end of the nineteenth century, a prison reform movement spearheaded by the Quakers which began to say that prison should be about reform not retribution. Again, I don't know whether this is true, but did that movement pass the United States by? In Europe the emphasis changed from lengthy sentences and harsh punishment to shorter sentences and rehabilitation for a life after prison. In the US, savage sentences seem to be common and the jails are full of people who are going to die behind bars, people whose lives are full of hopelessness. Retribution is the rule here and i wonder if that is something to do with the harsh form of evangelical christianity that pervades this country. If you lock people away for their natural lives, it is only a short step to saying that you must punish and keep inmates in order by forcing them into solitary confinement. Whatever the reason it is cruel beyond words and also stupid and counterproductive.

mike if you are not joking and wish to know this infoe start at the vary first use of solitary and prisons you find the verjen mary of are prisons and solitary eastern state penn site known more as ESP you share my goil mike i warn you now it is a hard and mentally painful rode for the week hardted and a up hill fight as well you have seen the man called stuart grassian on the show you wached i have met him in real life he is the fouder of shu sindrum lern all you can on this sindrum as well know that you make a target of your self for those in prison tops thow be wary for i to liveto fight to end solitary may you bring light to the darknes of justice and should you befall a fate in justice may thare be light in the darknes of justice for all who need it for all who wish it

I just watched the National Geographic story about the guys in Solitary, And I have a question.

When did we become the country we now are ? How can we treat people like this and expect that they will return to some semblance of normal behavior in their life ?

I watched them interview that warden, who by just looking at her and listening to her excuses that for trying to say hi to another inmate that constitutes a rule violation and another six months in segregation.

I'd love to see her last just a week, any one of those so called do gooder guards or wardens they know exactly what they are doing, committing homicide, longterm, and I plan to make it my life's ambition to see to it that the prison systems are reformed in this country and make sure that all the correction officers have to spend some time behind the bars themselves as to promote empathy for the inmates. I just have to mention that the warden, the overweight pock faced woman has made me sick to my stomach, and for the rest of my days I plan to see to it that first no woman should be running a male facility, second, she is so nasty to look at, and has such, I just can't talk, but if anyone in those facilities can read this please know that you have someone praying for you, and working everyday to see that you get treated like a human being.

oh my god sad thing is i have to admit some of those things happen to you no matter where you go though lol mom always says where you talking to your friends again when i talking to my self lol i laugh at things for no good reason i am right now to be honest there's parts of the time i can't even remember and some i laugh at now oh ya and when i get bored my body gets tired like it wants to sleep if i bored long enough it does sleep or at least zones out you know like when your friends just staring on at nothing but not a sleep but you say something and scare the shit out of him that sort of sleep though if i go too long i really do sleep at times you know i was not even in a prison though my time but i tell you what you not lying about the effects lol never hit the why would i want to leave i love this place though thank god all i can say is if i ever say i love oakhill and want to go back hit me in the head with a bullet or a shovel whatever is at hand lol cos if i say that my head not working no more anyways lol

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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