

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/06/22/solitary-watches-james-ridgeway-on-democracy-now-with-anthony-graves/>

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by [Sal Rodriguez](#) | June 22, 2012

Perhaps the most moving testimony Tuesdays Senate Judiciary Subcommittee [hearing](#) on solitary confinement came from death row exonoree Anthony Graves. Graves spent over 18 years on Texas death row for a crime he did not commit. Living in an 8 x 12 cell, he had little social contact, and described horrible, degrading conditions. Like all death row inmates, I was kept in solitary confinement. I lived under some of the worst conditions imaginable with the filth, the food, the total disrespect of human dignity, he testified, I lived under the rules of a system that is literally driving men out of their minds.

He goes on:

I was subjected to sleep deprivation. I would hear the clanging of metal doors throughout the night, an officer walking the runs and shining his flash light in your eyes, or an inmate kicking and screaming because hes losing his mind. Guys become paranoid, schizophrenic, and cant sleep because they are hearing voices. I was there when guys would attempt suicide by cutting themselves, trying to tie a sheet around their neck or overdosing on their medication. Then there were the guys that actually committed suicide.

Mr. Graves continues,

Solitary confinement does one thing, it breaks a mans will to live and he ends up deteriorating. Hes never the same person again. Then his mother comes to see her son sitting behind plexiglass, whom she hasnt been able to touch in years, and she has to watch as her child deteriorates right in front of her eyes. This madness has a ripple effect. It doesnt just affect the inmate; it also affects his family, his children, his siblings and most importantly his mother.

His experience in isolation has continued to haunt him,

I have been free for almost two years and I still cry at night, because no one out here can relate to what I have gone through. I battle with feelings of loneliness. Ive tried therapy but it didnt work. The therapist was crying more than me. She couldnt believe that our system was putting men through this sort of inhumane treatment.

To read his complete testimony, click [here](#).

To watch the full hearing from Tuesday, click [here](#).

Mr. Graves joined Solitary Watch co-founder James Ridgeway today on Democracy Now! with Amy Goodman to discuss solitary confinement and the historic hearing.

[youtube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8O-gX9mtEg8&w=560&h=315>]

[youtube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6WAGnK6tyYs&w=560&h=315>]

Sal Rodriguez was Solitary Watches first and most prolific intern. Based in Los Angeles, he served as an editorial writer and columnist for the Orange County Register and the Press-Enterprise, and is now the opinion editor for the Southern California News Group.

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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Solitary Watch and Democracy Now! are to be congratulated for covering this subject which is usually well hidden from the public in mainstream TV. Prison in general is a cash cow. Those who are making money from it don't want to draw any attention to it. Especially since it is from our money. I was upset to hear the comment that solitary confinement does not cause any injury. I only wish Mr. Graves would give a bit more voice to all of the others who are still in his previous situation. Guilty or not. If as Americans, we wish to stand for principles we and others can look up to, we must apply those principles universally, for all. Otherwise we are just a third world country in the making. Thanks! Great job on this!

listening to Mr. Graves is like listening to myself! The torture inflicted upon everyone held in solitary is very real. This is America and not a third world country. Abolish the death penalty, juvenile life without parole and solitary now. Thanks Solitary Watch.

Brian Nelson
Survivor of Tamms

Reblogged this on pastproduction.

It is staggering to hear solitary confinement described as restrictive housing. That Charles Samuels, Director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, can utter such a euphemism for torture in his Senate testimony, is enough to drive anyone insane. Yet he makes his living by doing so, and perhaps (who knows?) he says it and still sleeps well at night. Sleeping soundly, whether by night or by day, was a luxury denied to Anthony Graves for eighteen years, which makes it all the more amazing that he has survived with his sanity intact. May he, and Solitary Watch, continue the vital work of exposing torture in America.

Mr. Graves' description of solitary is much like what I experienced during a time when I was wrongfully held after a local woman made false charges against me. Americans do not understand that in some communities, all it takes for a man to go to jail is to be accused of an assault by a woman. Even though the charges are false, courts tend to rule based merely on the testimony of a woman (as if they never lie) Women lie all of the time and everyone knows that.

While I was incarcerated, I greatly preferred solitary. It was quiet and I could get books to read. The books were not always great books, but I could request categories of books to read. I also could write as much as I wanted. When I was in the general population, I could not sleep because of the incessant noise from the other inmates. The Blacks would run their mouths throughout the night. During the day, non-stop TV blasted the room. In solitary, I was always at peace. In the general population, I always had to watch my back.

The stories of self mutilation and insanity are, I believe accurate, however, I suspect that those people were already nuts when they were arrested.

The food was bland, and there was often not enough. I lost eighteen pounds in a very short period of time, even though I ate everything that came through the slot.

In Obama's America, because of his signing of the 2011 NDAA, federal agencies can arrest and jail our citizens INDEFINITELY without charge, or trial.

Solitary was the only place where I could have any peace while I was unlawfully imprisoned here in the United States. After I was finally released, nothing was done to the woman who lied in court in order to get me convicted. She is one of those red neck women who knows that the red neck cops will tolerate her lying, just to punish those who are not inbred and not red neck.

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