

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2020/11/24/for-thousands-of-people-trapped-in-solitary-confinement-under-covid-silence-death-please-help-us-break-the-silence/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | November 24, 2020

Dear Friends:

Torture is not health care.

Torture is not protection.

Torture is not the way to survive a pandemic.

Solitary confinement has been globally recognized as torture.

Yet in response to COVID-19, **300,000 incarcerated individuals a five-fold increase from the pre-pandemic population have been forced to endure solitary confinement**, and suffer the deep and lasting damage that comes from even brief stays in isolation.

Rather than turn to humane and effective strategies to stop the spread of COVID including decarceration and sound public health practices **prisons and jails have simply locked people in solitary** when they have been exposed to the virus, and even when they are sick.

Yet the coronavirus infection rate remains four times higher in prisons than in the population at large. An overwhelmingly disproportionate number of incarcerated people are black and brown, and many have physical, psychological, and cognitive disabilities which render them dangerously vulnerable to the effects of both COVID and solitary.

Solitary Watch was the first to expose the explosion in the use of solitary confinement and its failure to stop the spread, with [groundbreaking reporting](#) that formed the basis of an [influential report](#). And we have **raised up the voices of people inside**, who [describe being left to suffer through COVID alone](#) inside [concrete boxes](#).

Without work like ours, this suffering, which is hidden behind prison walls, takes place in silence. Drawing on the lessons of an earlier pandemic, we know that **silence still does and always will equal death.**

[PLEASE CLICK HERE TO SUPPORT OUR WORK.](#)

Over more than a decade, through original reporting, research and analysis, and work with partners, **Solitary Watch has been instrumental in raising public awareness of a once-invisible human rights crisis.** Our work informs and supports the community of advocates, journalists, attorneys, health professionals, public policymakers, and thousands of incarcerated individuals working to **expose the devastating damage caused by solitary confinement.**

Against entrenched practices and attitudes, this work helped bring about a slow but steady decline in the use of solitary in recent years. Then came the coronavirus pandemic.

Solitary Watch needs your support now more than ever to regain the hard-won progress made on this issue. With your help, we will uncover the facts and tell the stories that engage the hearts and minds of the American public to reject the harm being done in their name.

There has never been a better time to make a gift to Solitary Watch. Thanks to NewsMatch, **every donation made through December 31st, 2020, will be matched** up to \$5,000 per donation. And if you choose to make your gift recur monthly or quarterly, your donations will be matched every time throughout the year.

[GIVE TODAY AND YOUR DONATION WILL BE DOUBLED.](#)

The torture taking place in our prisons and especially in solitary cells depends upon silence to survive. **Please support our work, and**

help us break the silence.

Thank you.

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 [Jean Casella](#)

December 29, 2021

by [Jean Casella](#)

December 23, 2021

by [Events and Announcements](#)

December 3, 2021

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P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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