

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/06/18/now-available-collection-of-written-testimony-for-senate-judiciary-subcommittee-hearing-on-solitary-confinement/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | June 18, 2012

Solitary Watch is building an archive of written testimony submitted to the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights, in connection with the [hearing on solitary confinement](#) to be held on Tuesday at 10 am. You can access the archive (still a work-in-progress) by clicking [here](#), or by going through our [Resources](#) page.

We know we are still missing some submissions. If you are not included and would like to be, please email your testimony (as a Word or PDF file) to solitarywatchnews@gmail.com. We will add the testimony of the witnesses testifying at the hearing once it becomes available.

James Ridgeway and Sal Rodriguez will be live tweeting the hearing for Solitary Watch and Mother Jones tune in at [@solitarywatch](#) or [@motherjones](#). The hearing will also be webcast live on the Judiciary Committees website, [here](#).

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

Solitary Watch encourages comments and welcomes a range of ideas, opinions, debates, and respectful disagreement. We do not allow name-calling, bullying, cursing, or personal attacks of any kind. Any embedded links should be to information relevant to the conversation. Comments that violate these guidelines will be removed, and repeat offenders will be blocked. Thank you for your cooperation.

@Lois I salute you and your efforts. Thankfully my own experience with solitary pales in comparison to so many others. Where I spent mere weeks at a time others spent years or decades that is a huge difference. As far as speaking out I refer to my brother Victor that spent over a decade in the SHU often on here but he will never be able to testify in this world. As for my other brother Mike who has spent a year here and a year in the hole as a youth he has since lived under that rock Wilde refers to and is now about to die himself. With

respect for them both I attempt to give them a voice on this forum in hope that my humble efforts will benefit others.

We certainly feel for those of you who have lived in Solitary Confinement, and within the walls at all. We as families who have endured having a loved one that is or has been incarcerated may understand only minimally what the stigma is like out here. Then once you are released it never goes away. If we allow the stigma to take hold and keep us all silent, no change will be brought. I fear sharing what little truths I know from my sons experience, and what those within our organization have experienced. Yet I know he and others, as well as myself can only use this horrific experience to shed light on the truths we know, and work to educate those around us who know so little of what is happening within this system of mass incarceration. I thank you for sharing and shedding brighter light on how this has affected your life back in the community. Our Nation should be shamed for its lack change and lack of progressiveness regarding social justice and humanity.

I committed a crime, so you locked me up and committed horrendous crimes against me

I understand both of these last two remarks and let me say this Im in no way being critical of your choice to remain silent. I didnt submit a statement either because I didnt want to taint my children with my past. Rather I fault the system for holding our past against us. I also like the cleaver names that you choose to use on here. Your obviously perceptive and bright. But if we dont take a chance when such opportunities arise then will anything ever change? I do what I can on here without any reward other than the satisfaction of illuminating the hole so others can view it. I sell no books have no blog and seek no financial reward. I know the system can identify me but I hope potential employers cannot. So I participate with the full knowledge that others are using it as you describe and they even receive some funds to keep it going but at least they are attempting to do something for those we left behind. Maybe Im a chump but that is a risk that I am willing to make. It is too bad that you and I feel that we need to hide our identity I bet you have a compelling story to tell and the ability to present it.

Life after prison (or between trips) is isolating too. Even those activists, attorneys, Capitol-barnacles and former system actors who seek to reverse mass incarceration will treat a former prisoner in isolating ways- hugging your experience like you were a rich kid with the best toys, then relegating you to the bench like a fat kid when you venture to be anything more than a token formerly incarcerated person.

And if they slip up, and you make it past the bench, they will despise you for anything you accomplish, and will seek to belittle you and re-cast you as that poor fool destined to tell sob stories in committee hearings. God forbid you might make a living fighting injustice, as they do.

And people wonder why some of us are quiet about the fact that weve been to prison. I didnt survive that hell so I could fuel your hubris, help you sell books, spice up your blog and make your c3 look cool at funder briefings. I survived, and as much as Id like to help end mass incarceration, Ill be preserving my ability to get on with my life by not letting you brand me as your revolutionary flag.

Even nice, caring people treat former prisoners like tokens for their cause.

Those still in the hole must be asking Where are all the freed prisoners statements?
I dont see any.

Oscar Wilde wrote about life after prison:

Many men on their release carry their prison about with them into the air, and hide it as a secret disgrace in their hearts, and at length, like poor poisoned things, creep into some hole and die. It is wretched that they should have to do so, and it is wrong, terribly wrong, of society that it should force them to do so.

Society takes upon itself the right to inflict appalling punishment on the individual, but it also has the supreme vice of shallowness, and fails to realise what it has done. When the mans punishment is over, it leaves him to himself; that is to say, it abandons him at the very moment when its highest duty towards him begins.

It is really ashamed of its own actions, and shuns those whom it has punished, as people shun a creditor whose debt they cannot pay, or one on whom they have inflicted an irreparable, an irremediable wrong.

Therein lays the inner conflict and why the system gets away with all they do.

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