

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/03/28/solitary-confinement-rises-sharply-on-rikers-island-and-activists-respond/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | March 28, 2012

City Limits has [comprehensive coverage](#) of the ongoing rise in solitary confinement on Rikers Island (which we wrote about [here](#) back in November). The article begins:

Over the last two years, the Department of Correction has nearly doubled the number of punitive segregation cells the Department's term for solitary confinement at the jail facilities at Rikers Island. The 44 percent jump, DOC Commissioner Dora Schriro testified at a City Council budget hearing this month, constitutes the most significant increase in the department's history, one that prisoners rights groups say gives New York City one of the highest solitary confinement rates in the nation.

At press time, 914 inmates were being held in segregation at Rikers, meaning they are typically confined to their cells for 23 hours a day. Jail officials say this is a necessary tool to curtail an uptick in violence, maintain safety and order and deal with inmates who commit serious rule violations.

But prisoner advocacy groups say the increase is alarming at a time when the inmate population in the city's jails is at a low, and in light of a growing body of research that says solitary confinement does little to curb bad behavior, and could actually make some inmates act more violently.

By all accounts, the NYC DOC seems determined to move ahead with its plans to increase the number of solitary cells on Rikers to close to a thousand.

On the other side, there is growing resistance from inmates families and advocates for the rights of prisoners, people with mental illness, and juveniles in the justice system (since the latter two groups are grossly overrepresented in solitary confinement). A coalition concerned with conditions at Rikers has been meeting since late last year, and is holding a meeting tomorrow, Thursday, March 29. [Click here for details.](#)

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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The research that shows that inmates respond more violently after solitary confinement is correct. Being secluded from social situations doesn't help. I spent 10 years incarcerated for drug charges, with time in the SHU. I turned my life around writing drug war and prison novels to cope. The best medicine for inmates, especially in solitary, is to offer self help, schooling and a new direction for the inmates to focus on. They can change for the better like I did.

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