

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2010/07/15/a-supermax-prisoners-film-from-hell/>

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by [James Ridgeway](#) | July 15, 2010

Last night [HBO ran a documentary](#) shot by an inmate living in solitary confinement at New Jersey's Northern State Prison in Newark. The prisoner, Omar Broadway, a member of the Bloods gang, had served 7 years in solitary on various felony charges in the prison's Security Threat Group Management Unit. Sympathetic guards smuggled a camera into his cell, and Broadway shot his footage over a six-month period beginning in 2004. It became the basis for a film that premiered at this year's Tribeca Film Festival before being acquired by HBO.

In recent years there have been quite a number of television documentaries shot in prisons, sometime in their supermax units; these include the [National Geographic Channels Lockdown](#) series and [MSNBC's Lock Up](#). But as a [review in the Boston Globe](#) points out: There is a distance to all of them from the inner reality of those institutions. Such efforts are almost always approved by corrections officials, and we see very little of the life those officials don't want us to see.

Broadway's film is something different. Here's more from the *Boston Globe* review:

Despite limited camera range because of the small opening in his cell door, bad lighting, and jumpy camera work, he presents hallucinogenic sights and sounds of prison life: the remote echoes of voices, blurry frames of cell bars, indistinct figures of guards, inmates in their cells engaged in furious shadowboxing.

Most shocking are the protests by prisoners who refuse to return to their cells. They cover themselves in plastic to minimize the effects of pepper spray from the guards in riot gear, who charge in force. The guards quickly overwhelm the prisoners and beat them on the floor. Broadway chronicles a number of these ghastly rituals. The prisoners know what to expect, yet wait for the onslaught anyway, out of bravery or nihilistic resignation.

[The film] one chronicles the appalling prisoner abuse by guards as well as the terror of the officers working there. The guards are a gang in their own right, formed to protect themselves from very dangerous men who are behind bars 23 hours a day. There exists a vicious intimacy between the two camps.

Here, in the trailer, are a few shots from *An Omar Broadway Film*:

[youtube=<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OK-tbFE-yts>]



James Ridgeway (1936-2021) was 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*.

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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How can they get better if society promises help when there's no help.. all they see is walls. Of course, there's no way to go unpunished for their actions but how can they come out at least a little more sane when their programs are more strict than the ones we try to get into.. cmon how they gonna know something if they aren't allowed to call or get up and get info themselves.. so to judge for them to calm down when they get out would be a dumb thing to say, how about us help those who aren't lost yet figure something out? Or better yet, help those teens along they way so they won't end up where those adults are? No I'm not making excuses for those rapist, molesters or murders..they deserve time.

So much talk about prisoners feelings of abandonment and fear.

Not anything about the people they have murdered or raped or assaulted.

Where else are we supposed to put people who either don't give a solitary fuck about others or think doing crime is a pretty good time till they are caught.

Everything is an excuse.

What's happening to me. What I might do if and when I get out after being treated like a prisoner.

But society is tired of being scared and threatened.

If and when these dregs of society get out they better tow the freakin line. Or don't and we will send you back to your little concrete room.

Many people who watch the movie seem to take the side of the prison and the guards. The reason is because they see people acting out because of the torture regime and they conclude therefore that they deserve it and that they prove themselves to really be the worst of the worst. I haven't seen the movie myself so I don't know if they were able to properly convey the toll this has on people's minds but this is yet more proof of the extreme difficulty of trying to counter mental torture as opposed to physical torture, with no scars or anything like that to see.

The clip is all too real for me and the scenes brought back a wide range of emotions, dread, panic, fear, but mostly a feeling of abandonment and despair.

The prisoners know what to expect, yet wait for the onslaught anyway, out of bravery or nihilistic resignation.

I wondered just what the author meant to say when he wrote nihilistic resignation so I looked it up.

Nihilistic: annihilation of the self as an aspect of mystical experience.

Resignation: unresisting attitude.

But this also applies to many of these prisoners who worship George Jackson's philosophy.

Nihilistic principles hold that the existing social and political institutions must be destroyed in order to clear the way for a new state of society and employing extreme measures, including terrorism and assassination.

To which I reply in the words of Doris Lessing again. Yes things must change but as an older man

Remembering our time of total commitment to a set of dogmas that we now find pathetic, we tend to wear wry smiles. Perhaps it is not too much to say that in these violent times the kindest, wisest wish we have for the young must be: We hope that your period of immersion in group lunacy, group self-righteousness, will not coincide with some period of your country's history when you can put your murderous and stupid ideas into practice. If you are lucky, you will emerge much enlarged by your experience of what you are capable of in the way of bigotry and intolerance. You will understand absolutely how sane people, in periods of public insanity, can murder, destroy, lie, swear black is white.

Prisons We Choose to Live Inside

Violence begets violence and the state's capacity for violence is much greater than ours. But words are also mightier than the sword.

This is why I resigned as the first Female Catholic Prison Chaplain with the Colorado Dept of Corrections. As a War Widow who attended seminary on her late Beloved Husband's GI Bill; our Wounded Warriors incarcerated suffering from DOUBLE combat related PTSD and many times Traumatic Brain Injury from hitting their heads, being hit, etc.
wake up America

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