

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2010/10/14/teen-held-in-solitary-in-tennessee-jail-because-he-cant-make-bail/>

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | October 14, 2010

### CHILDREN IN LOCKDOWN

[Second Class Justice](#) is a first-class new blog published by Stephen B. Bright, who heads the Southern Center for Human Rights in Atlanta. Its primary aim is ending the unfair and discriminatory treatment of people in the criminal justice system by documenting that treatment. Its mission statement continues:

Contrary to the constitutional guarantees of due process and equal protection of the laws and the etching Equal Justice Under Law on the Supreme Court building, the kind of justice people get in America's courts depends very much upon the amount of money they have. Poor people are deprived of their liberty and even their lives because they cannot afford competent legal representation. The rich and guilty often have a better chance of avoiding conviction than those who are poor and innocent.

This blog documents examples of second class and sometimes third world justice for the poor and people of color in the hope that knowledge will someday overcome the indifference, hostility and racism that have affected the criminal justice system throughout America's history, and bring about a just, fair, humane and reliable system.

Recently, Bright [described the case](#) of a juvenile murder suspect who is being held in isolation in a county jail in Tennessee for the sole reason that his family is too poor to afford his bond, set at \$500,000.

A 15-year old child, JP, charged with murder, has been locked up in a cell in the Montgomery County in Clarksville, Tennessee since July 2009 with no physical contact from a member of his family and no schooling. His mother is allowed to visit him by seeing him twice a week for 30 minutes on a TV monitor. She has not touched her son in over a year. She has not hugged him, or kissed his cheek, or brushed his hair off his forehead. The child has gone for over a year with no physical contact other than a correctional officer holding his arms when they move him.

This is child abuse and neglect. If a parent locked a 15-year old child away for a year with no physical contact, he or she would be charged with child abuse. If the parent refused to let the child attend school for a year, he or she would be charged with child abuse or neglect, a well a violation the states compulsory education laws. Yet this is precisely what the officials at the Montgomery County Jail have been doing and intend to continue until trial, tentatively set for March 2011.

The psychological damage that is taking place is incalculable. The child was held in a mental hospital for a week and half immediately after his arrest. He attempted suicide shortly after being arrested while he was in a juvenile detention center. A mental health professional at the hospital prescribed him an anti-depressant. However, once the court ruled that he would be tried as an adult all treatment stopped. Six months after he went to jail, the jail physician, who is not a mental health professional, took him off of the anti-depressant. For a number of months, the child was held in his cell for 23 hours a day, allowed only one hour a day to shower and make phone calls. He is developing quirks, he jerks a lot when he talks, twitches his head.

Unless something changes, JP could spend close to two years in jail before he is tried in other words, while he remains, in the eyes of the law, innocent of any crime.

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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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hay i know alan is right on this WTF tennessee is going thow your dam heads plese i realy want know what makes you thinkk this is right you make me want to thow up doing that to a poor kid at least get him his dam trial done allready i mean kid file a habes corpus allready this is sick in the head who ever did this to him should have to go thow a mouth of it dam sick on all sens of the state i mean well done TENN state you just wiped your ass with are bill of rights well done you need more hear why not use your flag to no big deel to wipe with us flag after all you allready wiped with what it was based on freedom and rights well done morons grate to know you arnt the smart ones in the world get the kid out help him and get your head out your asshole TENN

My heart aches for this young man who although not even convicted has lost all rights. Yes, I believe that these types of conditions can be the catalyst which can throw one into the onset of a severe mental illness. Even in an otherwise healthy mind just due to the traumatic stress he is enduring symptoms of illness are likely to present or exacerbate. We are working in Arizona to bring common sense and humanity back to our justice system though the efforts of our agency Davids Hope. An effective system will release people from incarceration who will be less likely to commit a crime upon their release than they were when they went in. If we keep abusing our inmates, how will they ever find the hope they need on which to rebuild their lives.

A lot of issues here.

- 1) The practice of trying juveniles as adults which ends educational advancement. Wrong!
- 2) Holding the mentally ill and/or juveniles in long term isolation. Wrong!
- 3) The ability of the poor to bond out of jail. None existent!
- 4) And the inequality of our justice system issue. Hugh!

This article deals with the last one.

By Sasha Abramsky Posted on Slate Oct. 8, 2010

<http://www.slate.com/id/2270328/>

(Edited down)

Forty years after the United States began its experimentation with mass incarceration policies, the country is increasingly divided economically. In new research, a group of leading criminologists argued that much of that growing inequality is linked to the increasingly widespread use of prisons and jails.

Its well-known that the United States imprisons drastically more people than other Western countries. In 2008, New York Times reporter Adam Liptak pointed out that overseas criminologists were mystified and appalled by the scale of American incarceration. States like California now spend more on locking people up than on funding higher education.

In devastating sociologists have shown how poverty creates prisoners and how prisons in turn fuel poverty. Crunching the numbers, they concluded that once a person has been incarcerated, the experience limits their earning power and their ability to climb out of poverty even decades after their release. Its a vicious feedback loop that is affecting an ever-greater percentage of the adult population and shredding part of the fabric of 21st-century American society.

The authors looked at the effect on employment data if prisoners were factored into the unemployment numbers generated by the government.

Western and Pettit found that after being out of prison for 20 years, less than one-quarter of ex-cons who havent finished high school were able to rise above the bottom 20 percent of income earners, a far lower percentage than for high-school dropouts who dont go to prison. They conclude that the ex-cons end up passing on their economic handicap, and by extension the propensity of ending up behind bars, to their children and their childrens children in turn. As evidence, they cite recent surveys indicating children of prisoners are more

likely to live in poverty, to end up on welfare, and to suffer the sorts of serious emotional problems that tend to make holding down jobs more difficult.

University of California at Berkeley professor of law Jonathan Simon writes that these men and women in many ways become the human equivalent of underwater homes bought with subprime mortgagesthey are toxic persons in the way those homes have been defined as toxic assets, condemned to failure.

As this new research so clearly shows, locking up poor people in historically unprecedented numbers has undermined one of Americas most durable, and valuable, traitsocial mobility.

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