

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2010/07/14/clarence-thomas-outraged-by-treatment-of-his-nephew-but-condones-the-same-for-thousands-of-others/>

Campaign and Advocacy

close

Search

close

close

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

Supreme Court Justice [Clarence Thomas was reportedly](#) completely shocked and outraged when he learned that his nephew, who suffers from epilepsy and was reportedly suicidal, was beaten and tased with a stun gun at a Louisiana hospital apparently, for nothing more than some unruly behavior.

Outraged we can understand: What happened to 24-year-old Derek Thomas does qualify as outrageous. According to an account on [Raw Story](#):

[Derek Thomas](#) was admitted to West Jefferson Hospital in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana, Thursday, after a possible suicide attempt, reports ABC affiliate WGNO.

When the Supreme Court justice's nephew refused to put on a hospital gown and said he wanted to leave the hospital, doctors ordered security to restrain him.

Security guards punched him in his lip, pulled out more than a fistful of his dreadlocks and tasered him to restrain him, a statement from Thomas family said.

Shortly afterwards, family members say, Thomas suffered a massive epileptic seizure.

Still, there's no reason why Justice Thomas should be shocked that such a thing could happen. As one of the nine highest placed individuals in the U.S. Justice system, he should know that these things and much worse happen every day to Americans who suffer from mental illness.

Our [jails are now the largest mental health facilities](#) in the nation, and they are filled with people who are there because they exhibited behavior common to untreated mental illness, including drug abuse, assault, and quality of life crimes. Once in jail, they are likely to further act out and [land in solitary confinement](#) which is of course the worst possible place for them. Derek Thomas was reportedly deemed to be suicidal when he arrived at the hospital. A common treatment for suicidal prisoners is, again, placement in solitary confinement, for their own protection. Once there, many of these prisoners [make every attempt](#) to kill themselves and [some succeed](#).

As [we wrote earlier this week](#), the St. Tammany Parish Jail in Covington, Louisiana which is just 50 miles north of the hospital where Derek Thomas suffered his abuse has come up with a novel solution to the problem of suicidal inmates. It places them in 3 x 3 cages, half-naked and without bedding, a toilet, or anything else they might use to do themselves in. Some have remained in the cages for weeks or even months. The [ACLU of Louisiana](#) is fighting for their release, but have so far been unsuccessful.

Clarence Thomas has yet to protest the torture of St. Tammany Parish's suicidal prisoners or of any prisoners at all, for that matter. As *New York Times* Supreme Court reporter [Linda Greenhouse wrote](#) earlier this year, Clarence Thomas has never once sided with a prisoner who claimed violation of the Eighth Amendment's guarantee against cruel and unusual punishment. This included a case where a guard had responded to [a prisoners'] request for a grievance form by slamming him onto the concrete floor and then punching, kicking and choking him until another guard pulled the attacker off, and another where an inmate had been handcuffed to a hitching post and left to stand shirtless in the sun for seven hours without water or bathroom breaks. Thomas has said that the framers of the Constitution simply did not conceive of the Eighth Amendment as protecting inmates from harsh treatment.

To our knowledge, Justice Thomas also has never spoken out in any way about the suffering of the mentally ill in the United States, whether in prisons and jails, in genuine mental health facilities, or on the streets, where millions of homeless mentally ill people live out their lives.

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.

Here's a different viewpoint:

<http://reason.com/archives/2000/07/01/curing-the-therapeutic-state-t>

Thomas Szasz says, The classification of (mis)behavior as illness provides for state-sponsored social control.

Maybe now the collision of mental health problems and standard operating procedures in prisons and jails will become real to Justice Thomas. The realization that we all deserve basic human rights often begins when one knows someone in this situation. I can only hope that Justice Thomas is insightful enough to realize his nephew's experiences are only the tip of the iceberg.

It is the injustice of the justice system a friend of mine died in Indianapolis, In his name was Charles Repazz he was not given medical treatment in jail and died in his cell screaming in pain as guards walked by laughing he left behind a wife daughter & son

Poor Doubting Thomas!

You just didn't believe it could happen.
Although you are no Apostle maybe you too will be forgiven.

<http://img.aquinasandmore.com/saintthomastheapostle.jpg>

Learn our history.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/lobotomist-bedlam-1946/>

In 1943 a group of conscientious objectors stationed at Cleveland State Hospital laid a stack of affidavits a foot high on the desk, covering the abuse of the mentally ill that they witnessed.

This quote was taken from this PBS special.

At first the stories were met by officials with shocked cries of it ain't so.

For what happens to the mentally-sick in our present hellhole hospitals is not the sad experience of some other fellow. Every minister, every doctor and every leader of any community organization knows that mental illness can strike down members of his immediate circle.

And here is some light reading on our present day situation.

http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2007/12/10/left_in_uncertain_hands_a_haunted_life_ends_tragically/

BELIEVE IT!

One can only hope that having the dagger come close to his heart would awaken Clarence Thomas, along with other of our leaders, and the millions of our countrymen/women who are unconscious of/untroubled by the relegation of the mentally ill to prison (following the closing of the state mental hospitals in the nineties to save money).

Mental hospitals weren't great and did not cure illness, but to put the mentally ill into the street when they cannot fend for themselves, or prison when they misbehave, is cruel beyond the ordinary level of punishment, which is high enough already even for the guilty.

Would that every judge and justice in the land had to confront this savagery in his/her own family; oh yes, throw in the wardens and their lieutenants across the land whose comfortable lives are almost never troubled by the torture of helpless victims under their watch.

Others in positions of power maybe should experience first hand what goes on in the world of incarceration/detainment themselves so than feel the pain and indignation themselves first hand.

wow.. is this GENUINE Justice? Me thinks it is starting to look like it. now lets see some checks and balanaces

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

Solitary Watch

Copyright 2022, Solitary Watch

Read about [rights and permissions](#).



Solitary Watch News