

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2011/09/21/the-torture-of-troy-davis/>

Campaign and Advocacy

close

Search

close

close

by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | September 21, 2011

If Troy Davis's execution takes place, as scheduled, at 7 pm tonight, it will bring a devastating end to years of torture on death row. The cruel and unusual punishment of a possibly innocent man includes not only his death at the hands of the state, but the 20 years he spent in solitary confinement on death row, with no fewer than four scheduled execution dates.

According to [Time on Death Row](#), a report produced by the Death Penalty Information Center, Psychologists and lawyers in the United States and elsewhere have argued that protracted periods in the confines of death row can make inmates suicidal, delusional and insane. Some have referred to the living conditions on death row the bleak isolation and years of uncertainty as to time of execution as the death row phenomenon, and the psychological effects that can result as death row syndrome.'

Troy Davis's experience, with its multiple imminent executions, has been particularly torturous. Ed Pilkington writes in [The Guardian](#):

On 23 September 2008, Davis came within 90 minutes of execution. He was taken off the gurney after the US supreme court intervened.

That was his second execution date. On 16 July 2007 he was granted a stay just one day before he was due to die, and on 24 October 2008, at the third attempt to kill him, he was spared temporarily three days before his execution date.

Experts in death row and its psychological impact on prisoners say that such multiple exposure to imminent judicial death is tantamount to a form of torture. It can induce post-traumatic stress disorder, and human rights campaigners say it should be classified as cruel and unnatural treatment that should be banned, irrespective of the guilt or innocence of the prisoner.

Stuart Grassian, a psychiatrist with extensive experience of treating death row inmates, has had patients who came within hours of death but were later proven to have been innocent. I have watched what happens to them, and the effects are horrendous. People suffer immeasurably.

One of his patients came close to being executed on the electric chair. The image of burning up in the chair stayed with him for years afterwards.

Brian Evans, a death row specialist with the US branch of Amnesty, pointed out that under international law, mock executions were considered to be a form of torture. Troy Davis's treatment was not a mock execution, but it has had the same effect. Especially when he has come within hours of death, and said his final goodbyes that is certainly similar to torture.

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.

An excerpt from:

Ballad of Reading Gaol
by Oscar Wilde

http://emotional literacy education.com/classic_books_online/rgaol10.htm

.They hanged him as a beast is hanged:
They did not even toll
A requiem that might have brought
Rest to his startled soul,
But hurriedly they took him out,
And hid him in a hole.
They stripped him of his canvas clothes,
And gave him to the flies;
They mocked the swollen purple throat
And the stark and staring eyes:
And with laughter loud they heaped the shroud
In which their convict lies.
The Chaplain would not kneel to pray
By his dishonored grave:
Nor mark it with that blessed Cross
That Christ for sinners gave,
Because the man was one of those
Whom Christ came down to save.
Yet all is well; he has but passed
To Life's appointed bourne:
And alien tears will fill for him
Pity's long-broken urn,
For his mourner will be outcast men,
And outcasts always mourn..

I am aching, just absolutely aching that this happens. I admit, I had to look up Troy Davis on google, and when I read it, I have been saddened so very very deeply. God bless him. I cannot believe people sometimes well, I can, but I don't want to. Shame here.

Also lots of info at this website where you are SolitaryWatch.org and they have a wonderful FACT sheet.

Solitary confinement in CA is used abusively for punishment. There are people who have been in solitary confinement for years in CA, and now those prisoners have been on a hunger strike. They stopped for awhile when the Dept of Corr told them they would review their demands. But it hasn't gone as well as what they wanted, and they will resume the Hunger Strike on Sept 26th. You can get more information from <http://prisonerhungerstrike.wordpress.com/> or San Francisco Bay View newspaper, which is current on Pelican Bay Hunger Strike, and also you can get my monthly newsletter on-line by signing up for email at: <http://www.SJRA1.com> To see the past issues, Click on The Advocate, and see all the front pages from which you can download each issue.

after 20 years in solitary confinement, this man must be no more than a zombie. there is no way that someone can be buried alive for that long and still have a shred of sanity.

i wish i could find more info on how solitary confinement is used. if it is for a brief period for uncontrollable behavior, i am not against it. but if lasts for months with absolutely no human contact, then you may as well execute because it is far more inhumane than execution to torture someone for that long.

If Hell is aloneness or separation from God, then surely Death Row is the closest thing man has invented that separates the human being from all other existence, relationship, communication. It is sad that as living souls, we want forgiveness for ourselves, yet we are unwilling to forgive others, and have no conscience about our responsibility toward the treatment and care of our fellow man. The Bible says that mercy triumphs over judgment. But today we failed. There was no mercy shown for Troy Davis. This says a lot about who we are as a society. God forgive us we don't know what we are doing.

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

Solitary Watch

Copyright 2022, Solitary Watch

Read about [rights and permissions](#).



Solitary Watch News