

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2010/09/22/a-chance-at-freedom-for-the-scott-sisters/>

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | September 22, 2010

The case of sisters Jamie and Gladys Scott, two African American women serving life sentences for an \$11 robbery that took place in rural Mississippi in 1993, has gained prominence in recent weeks. The case has a growing urgency, not only because of the unjust length of the sentence and issues with the fairness of the trial, but also because Jamie Scott is suffering from end-stage renal disease, and is receiving questionable care in prison.

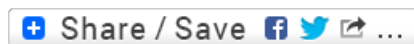
Last Tuesday the head of the NAACP, Ben Jealous, [urged Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour](#) to pardon the Scotts, saying "We're looking for the governor to be a humane person in the situation. It is a hideous event in the history of Mississippi." [According to the Jackson Advocate](#), Jealous joined the Scotts' attorney, Chokwe Lumumba, in presenting a petition to Barbour requesting a pardon, clemency, or compassionate release.

In Jackson the following day, [several hundred people marched](#) past the Governor's Mansion and rallied at the Mississippi State Capitol in support of the Scotts. According to Lumumba, thousands of letters have been sent asking Barbour to free the sisters.

Haley Barbour is widely thought to be in the running for the presidency on the Republican ticket, a fact that could cut two ways in the case of the Scotts. On the one hand, he might want to maintain his law and order stance at the expense of the two women. On the other hand, the Scotts' sentence is so absurd that even the DA who convicted them says it should be reduced, and Barbour might be thinking of letting them go as a small step towards wooing the black vote. In any event, the Scott sisters' supporters have made their case a difficult one for the governor to simply ignore, which is how he deals with most clemency requests.

None of these developments have had any effect on the hard-nosed Judge Marcus Gordon, who originally sentenced the two women, and who remains in charge of their case. According to Nancy Lockhart, the legal analyst who made the case public and remains in close touch with members of the Scott family, Gordon would not sign an order for the sisters to attend their grandfather's funeral but they were allowed to attend the wake in shackles.

Solitary Watch was among the first news sources to publish a comprehensive story about the Scott sisters case. You can read the [original story here](#), and a [follow-up story here](#).



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 [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 26, 2022

by [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

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sad and sick this judge is sick not letting them go to there famlys goodbye time for a grandfather thats not cool thaey realy cared for the man i can tell cos they still whent even thow they had to go in chains thats love on the sisters part they shouldent have made them go like that thats got to be inbaressing you stick out like that so much not in a good way what shows me they love the man is that they still whent knowing this as for the judge he needs to do a week himself walk the streets of his touwn and famly as they had to thare and maby he see what he did to them even so at suck a time in thare lifes may thare be light in the darknes of justice

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