

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2010/10/18/the-colorado-files-death-in-a-denver-jail/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | October 18, 2010

As we were preparing to make our recent trip to Colorado, the district attorney in Denver decided not to file criminal charges against the group of corrections deputies who, according to the coroner, were responsible for the death of an inmate in a local jail.

Marvin Booker, who was a preacher and homeless, was 56 years old. He was 5-foot-5 and weighed 135 pounds, and suffered from emphysema and an enlarged heart. Back in July, Booker was arrested on the misdemeanor charge of possession of drug paraphernalia, and he was waiting to be booked when a conflict arose. All of it was caught on video, which the state refuses to make public. DA Mitch Morrissey said in a statement that Booker refused to follow an order from a female deputy, then cursed her and violently resisted.

As the [Denver Post reports](#), Denver's Office of the Coroner listed the cause of death as cardiorespiratory arrest during physical restraint, and ruled it a homicide. The *Post* continues:

But it was up to Morrissey to determine whether the deputies were legally justified in handling Booker the way they did. At one point, according to the coroner's review of the video, four deputies lay on top of the 135-pound Booker while a fifth discharged a Taser into his legs. After Booker was carried face-down into a holding cell, a deputy remained on top of him for another 90 seconds to two minutes.

Other inmates and an attorney for Booker's family said Morrissey failed to take into account that the confrontation could have been avoided by deputies. Booker was trying to retrieve his shoes before being placed in a holding cell, according to witnesses, when he was grabbed by a deputy and ordered to comply immediately.

But [DA Morrissey insists](#) that Booker alone was responsible for his own demise. Mr. Booker's actions and choices resulted in his death, he said in a statement, suggesting that unruly behavior by a prisoner justifies a use of force sufficient to kill him. Had he complied, had he given them his arms, had he gone to the holding cell when he was asked to, Morrissey said, this never would have happened.

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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.

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October 26, 2022

by [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

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Everyone knows who the complicit murdering criminals are. We are not under Mitch Morrissey's satanic spell or influence. We can see. But you keep selling the wanting-your-shoes-is-a-capital-offense story your peddling Mitch, while the Holy Spirit directs justice towards you.

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