

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2010/10/12/scott-sisters-case-wins-national-attention/>

Campaign and Advocacy

close

Search

close

close

by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | October 12, 2010

Jamie and Gladys Scott are two young women from rural Mississippi who were convicted, on questionable evidence, of involvement in an armed robbery that netted \$11, and were sentenced to life in prison. Jamie Scott is suffering from end-stage renal disease, exacerbated by prison conditions and inadequate treatment so her life sentence may soon become a death sentence.

We were among the first non-local media to write about the case of the Scott sisters, both [here](#) (and [here](#)) on Solitary Watch and for [Mother Jones](#). Now the case is finally getting some national attention: The president of the NAACP, Ben Jealous, has called the sisters' situation utterly inhumane; along with a growing number of grassroots supporters, he is urging Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour to consider a pardon or commutation of their sentence. Today, this same call was made by *New York Times* op-ed columnist Bob Herbert. After describing the Scotts' conviction and sentence, he writes:

This is Mississippi we're talking about, a place that in many ways has not advanced much beyond the Middle Ages.

The authorities did not even argue that the Scott sisters had committed the robbery. They were accused of luring two men into a trap, in which the men had their wallets taken by acquaintances of the sisters, one of whom had a shotgun.

It was a serious crime. But the case against the sisters was extremely shaky. In any event, even if they were guilty, the punishment is so wildly out of proportion to the offense that it should not be allowed to stand.

Three teenagers pleaded guilty to robbing the men. They ranged in age from 14 to 18. And in their initial statements to investigators, they did not implicate the Scott sisters.

But a plea deal was arranged in which the teens were required to swear that the women were involved, and two of the teens were obliged, as part of the deal, to testify against the sisters in court.

Howard Patrick, who was 14 at the time of the robbery, said that the pressure from the authorities to implicate the sisters began almost immediately. He testified, They said if I didn't participate with them, they would send me to Parchman and make me out a female.

He was referring to Mississippi State Prison, which was once the notoriously violent Parchman prison farm. The lawyer questioning the boy said, In other words, they would send you to Parchman and you would get raped, right?

Yes, sir, the boy said. The teens were sentenced to eight years in prison each, and they were released after serving just two years.

This is a case that should be repugnant to anyone with the slightest interest in justice. The right thing to do at this point is to get the sisters out of prison as quickly as possible and ensure that Jamie gets proper medical treatment.

There was a range of possible sentences for the crime of armed robbery, but the state asked for and received two consecutive life sentences for the Scott sisters. In contrast, Edgar Ray Killen, the man convicted in 2005 of three counts of manslaughter in the 1964 deaths of civil rights workers Schwerner, Cheney, and Goodman, received a sentence of 20 years for each of the three deaths under the [same judge](#) who presided over the trial of Jamie and Gladys Scott. Herbert continues:

I have no idea why the authorities were so dead set on implicating the Scott sisters in the crime and sending them away for life, while letting the teens who unquestionably committed the robbery get off with much lighter sentences.

Life sentences for robbery can only be imposed by juries in Mississippi, but it is extremely rare for that sentencing option to even be included in the instructions given to jurors. It's fair to think, in other words, that there would have to be some extraordinary reason for prosecutors and the court to offer such a draconian possibility to a jury.

The reason for giving the jury the option of imposing life sentences in this case escapes me. Even the original prosecutor, Ken Turner, who is now retired and who believes the sisters were guilty, has said that he thinks it would be appropriate to offer them relief from their

extreme sentences. He told *The Clarion-Ledger* in Jackson, Miss., It was not a particularly egregious case.

The appeals process for the women has long since been exhausted. It is up to Governor Barbour, who is considering petitions on the sisters behalf, to do the humane thing.

A pardon or commutation of sentence some form of relief that would release Jamie and Gladys Scott from the hideous shackles of a lifetime in prison is not just desirable, its absolutely essential.



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

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.

Im glad somebody took interest in these young women case because it dont make no sense that the system failed to give them the proper justice that they deserve

THE PRESIDENT SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THIS CASE
INVOLVING THE SCOTT SISTERS.
I BELIVE IF HE GOT A FULL REPORT IT WOULD MAKE
A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE FOR JAMIE AND GLAYDS.
MICHAEL PATTERSON

Thank you for your continued & excellent coverage of this case!!

The more perplexing question is why it took so long to get any MSM attention to this atrocity !
Here is a 2009 radio interview that may add to the discussion. At OUR COMMON GROUND we did a few interviews on the subject in 3009 and 2010. Our first was March, 2009. It just goes to show that no real news reporter exist in America.

Here is our interview:

<http://ourcommongroundtalk.wordpress.com/about/our-common-ground-on-demand/ocg-3-04-09-the-wrongful-conviction-of-the-scott-sisters/>

good for them glad to see they wining and being herd may they brake the darknes of justice

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

Solitary Watch

Copyright 2022, Solitary Watch

Read about [rights and permissions](#).



Solitary Watch News