

September 29, 2023
4:00 – 6:00 pm
Connan Room,
Cohen University Center
Carnegie Mellon University

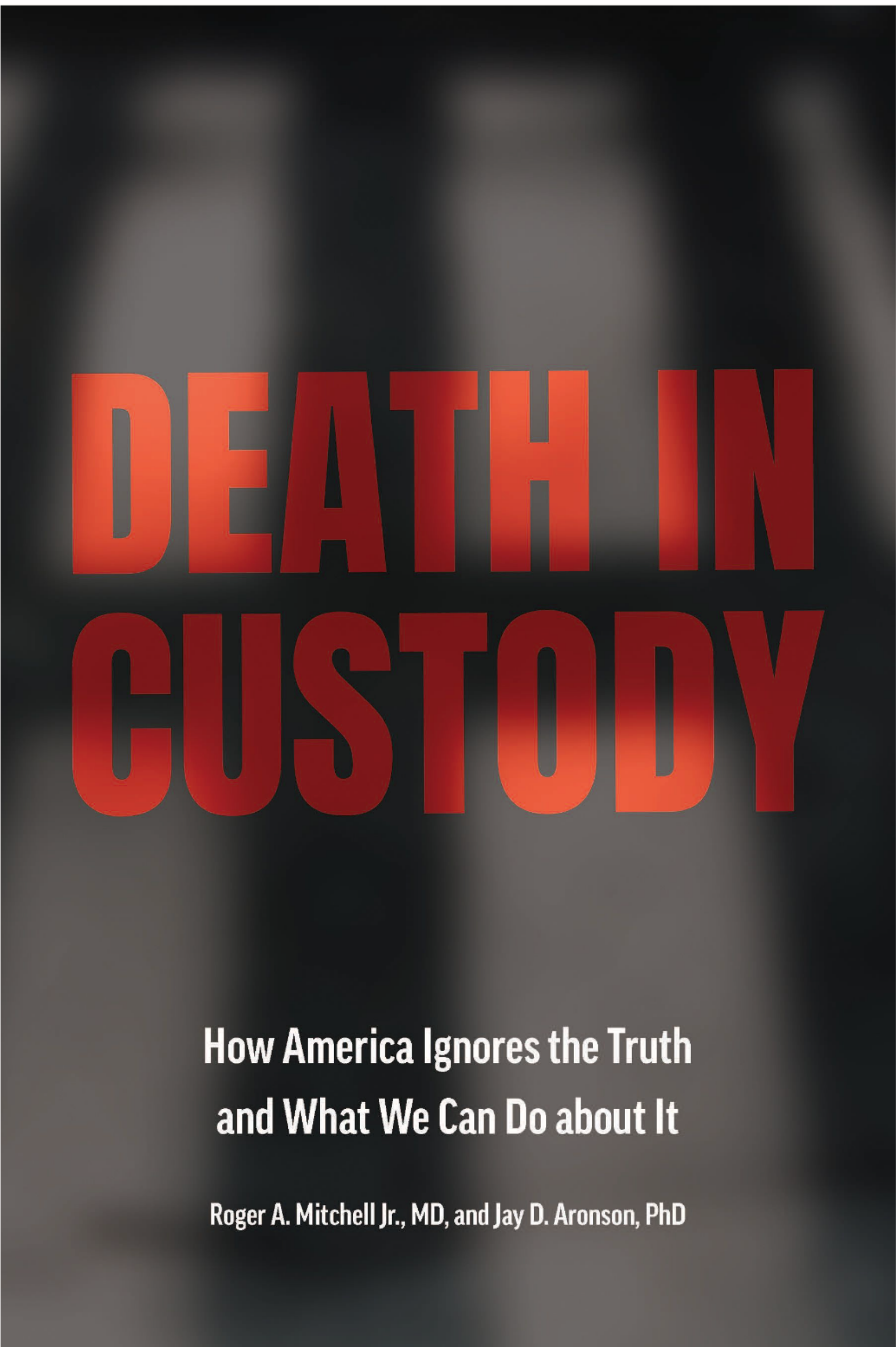
Death in Custody

How America Ignores the Truth and What We Can Do about It

Deaths resulting from interactions with the US criminal legal system are a public health emergency, but the scope of this issue is intentionally ignored by the very systems that are supposed to be tracking these fatalities. We don't know how many people die in custody each year, whether in an encounter with police on the street, during transport, or while in jails, prisons, or detention centers. In order to make a real difference and address this human rights problem, researchers and policy makers need reliable data.

In *Death in Custody*, Roger A. Mitchell Jr., MD, and Jay D. Aronson, PhD, share the stories of individuals who died in custody and chronicle the efforts of activists and journalists to uncover the true scope of deaths in custody. From Ida B. Wells’s enumeration of extrajudicial lynchings more than a century ago to the Washington Post’s current effort to count police shootings, the work of journalists and independent groups has always been more reliable than the state's official reports. Through historical analysis, Mitchell and Aronson demonstrate how government at all levels has intentionally avoided reporting death-in-custody data.

Mitchell and Aronson outline a practical, achievable system for accurately recording and investigating these deaths. They argue for a straightforward public health solution: adding a simple checkbox to the US Standard Death Certificate that would create an objective way of recording whether a death occurred in custody. They also propose the development of national standards for investigating deaths in custody and the creation of independent regional and federal custodial death review panels. These tangible solutions would allow us to see the full scope of the problem and give us the chance to truly address it.



Roger A. Mitchell Jr., MD, is a professor and chair of pathology at the Howard University College of Medicine. He is a forensic pathologist who previously served as the Chief Medical Examiner and Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice of Washington, DC. He is the author of *The Price of Freedom: A Son's Journey*.



Jay D. Aronson, PhD, is the founder and director of the Center for Human Rights Science at Carnegie Mellon University, where he is a professor of science, technology, and society in the Department of History. He is the author of *Who Owns the Dead? The Science and Politics of Death at Ground Zero* and *Genetic Witness: Science, Law, and Controversy in the Making of DNA Profiling*.



Melanie Newport, PhD, is an assistant professor of history at the University of Connecticut. Her research focuses on the policies and institutions of urban criminal justice systems in the United States. Her recently published book *This is My Jail: Local Politics and the Rise of Mass Incarceration* uses Chicago and Cook County as a case study to situate the late twentieth-century escalation of mass incarceration in a longer history of racialized, politically repressive jailing.



David Harris is the Sally Ann Semenko Endowed Chair and Professor of Law at the University of Pittsburgh’s law school. His research focuses on police conduct, search and seizure law, and the intersection of race and criminal justice. His book *Profiles in Injustice* and his many scholarly articles on racial profiling resulted in new laws, and regulations in hundreds of American police departments. Harris's most recent book, *A City Divided: Race, Fear, and the Law in Police Confrontations* tells the story of Jordan Miles, and how his death helps explain police/civilian violence in Pittsburgh.