

Police reign of terror intensifies at Los Angeles County Jail

Alan Gilman
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Recent independent eyewitness testimony reveals that the Los Angeles County Jail, the nation's largest with over 17,000 inmates, continues to be plagued by brutal assaults upon its inmates by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, which operates the jail.

The jail has a long, documented history of such abuse. Deputies are usually initially assigned to jail duty when they join the department. There they are immersed in a culture of sadistic and arbitrary treatment of prisoners, in order to anesthetize them to any compunctions they might have about using force.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) initially sued Los Angeles County in 1975 in federal court, charging that the conditions that inmates were subjected to in the jail violated the prohibition in the Eighth Amendment to the US Constitution against cruel and unusual punishment. Those conditions included overcrowding, systematic assaults on inmates by sheriff's deputies, and inadequate medical care.

In 1978, following a 17-day trial, and unannounced jail inspections by the federal judge, the court granted an injunction ordering the county to implement improvements in jail conditions, including conditions of overcrowding, inadequate exercise, and lack of clean clothing and telephone access.

The court case was reopened in 1984. Since then the jail conditions have been continually litigated in federal court. The court has appointed various parties and experts to monitor conditions within the jail.

Despite such checks, these systematic problems have only intensified. In December the ACLU asked the federal court to order a new trial in the case based on "an escalating crisis of deputy violence, abuse, and inmate suicides."

The observations of one of the jail monitors in particular precipitated the latest revelations of deputy

brutality. ACLU monitor Esther Lim reported that in January while she was working in the jail talking to another inmate, she saw two deputies beating inmate James Parker. Lim said the deputies continued to beat Parker even though he seemed unconscious and was not fighting back. According to Lim, Parker "looked like a mannequin that was being used as a punching bag." Lim did not believe the deputies knew she was there, so they continued to pummel Parker and used a stun gun on the inmate's limp body.

On September 28, 2011, the ACLU submitted to the court 70 sworn declarations detailing deputy abuse of inmates, including statements from Lim, two chaplains and Hollywood producer Scott Budnick, who had worked at the jail for five years as a volunteer teaching writing.

The Sheriff's Department has recently also had to acknowledge the existence within its ranks of gang-like groups with such names as the Grim Reapers, the Vikings, the Little Devils and the 3000s. Members have distinctive tattoos, use gang-like signs to identify themselves, and use distinctive code words.

The 3000s consist of a group of deputies who work on the 3rd floor of the jail, and sport "3000" tattoos. This is the floor of the jail that has recorded the most use-of-force incidents. In March of this year Los Angeles County Sheriff Lee Baca fired six of its members. Their firings, however, had nothing to do with their abuse of inmates. Instead they were terminated for assaulting, during a sheriff's Christmas party, two other deputies who complained about their work performance.

Several months ago the FBI began its own investigation into the ongoing abuse at the jail. According to Sheriff Baca, the FBI utilized an inmate as an informant and helped the inmate to unlawfully

obtain a cell phone so he could communicate with the FBI. According to Baca, the informant volunteered that he knew of a deputy willing to smuggle contraband (cell phones) into the jail for cash. The FBI provided \$1,500 for the inmate to pay the deputy for a phone. Later, the FBI showed up at the deputy's home in an attempt to make him an informant.

This operation collapsed when the inmate's cell phone was discovered, along with his notes detailing his involvement in the FBI investigation. The deputy who provided the phone to the inmate was suspended and thereafter resigned.

Instead of addressing the numerous complaints of abuse by his deputies, Sheriff Baca, incensed that the FBI had not notified him of their investigation, initially sent his investigators to the home of the lead FBI agent, ostensibly to investigate him for the crime of unlawfully providing an inmate with a cell phone.

Baca's effort to cover up abuse by his deputies is only the latest example of the Sheriff's Department's long history of covering up such abuse and protecting the deputies involved whenever it is exposed.

The Sheriff's Department even went so far as charge James Parker, the inmate who was observed by monitor Esther Lim as he was being brutally beaten by deputies, with assaulting the deputies. The Los Angeles County district attorney, instead of charging the deputies with assault, then prosecuted Parker.

A jury on September 28, 2011 was unable to reach a verdict in the case. But a majority voted to acquit Parker of three counts of battery and resisting arrest. The hung jury was a blow to the Sheriff's Department and the Los Angeles County district attorney's office. Parker's attorney Damon Hobdy said, "The allegations are made up and this man didn't do what they said he did. To cover it up, they put those charges on him."

The public outcry over Baca's efforts to dismiss and cover up the blatant abuse by his deputies caused him on October 10, 2011 to announce the creation of a special jail investigations task force consisting of 35 full-time investigators to reexamine old allegations of abuse, including the dozens presented by the ACLU.

As with similar "commissions" and "special investigations" that have been convened by various policies agencies to investigate itself, this one too can be expected to cover up and minimize the brutal methods that are an institutional policy of the Los

Angels County Sheriff's Department.

The ongoing and longstanding police terror within the Los Angeles County Jail is not atypical of the methods used by the police against the more than 2 million people incarcerated in jails and prisons throughout the United States. With the economic crisis intensifying class conflicts, the ruling class is being compelled to deploy ever-increasing violence against its most oppressed victims.



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