New torture allegations from Chicago “black site”

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New allegations of sexual assault, torture, and the planting of evidence by the Chicago Police Department (CPD) have come to light as part of ongoing revelations about the department’s “black site” at Homan Square. At least 17 victims have given first-hand accounts since the existence of Chicago’s interrogation site at Homan Square was exposed by the *Guardian* in February.

According to these accounts, working-class and minority Chicagoans were held for hours and sometimes days in fetid conditions, denied access to lawyers, and physically abused or threatened until they agreed to police demands. In some instances, individuals were forced to participate in petty drug stings or supply the police with off-the-books firearms.

In the latest interview by the *Guardian*, Angel Perez described his interrogation at the CPD black site. On October 12, 2012, Perez was detained by police after he refused to buy drugs for a sting operation. Without being charged, he was brought to Homan Square for questioning and shackled, bent over a bench. The police threatened to send him to Cook County Jail where they said he would be raped and assaulted by other inmates. According to Perez, an officer then proceeded to sodomize him with what the officer claimed was a pistol.

The officers then took Perez to the bathroom to clean up and he agreed to buy the $170 worth of heroin they wanted for the sting. Perez filed suit detailing his allegations in 2013 and through the courts has acquired video evidence demonstrating that he was in custody despite never being booked, charged, or allowed legal counsel. Since more widespread allegations of abuse surfaced in connection with Homan Square, four other people have joined his lawsuit.

According to the lawsuit, two of the plaintiffs, Estephanie Martinez and Calvin Coffey, were forced to relieve themselves after being chained for hours with no access to bathroom facilities. Many of those interviewed by the *Guardian* report being chained in rooms smelling of urine and feces.

In what has become a recurring theme in these independently reported allegations, another plaintiff, Juanita Berry, accuses officers of demanding that she give them two handguns “or else they would charge her with aiding the delivery of a controlled substance.” After hours of threats, she agreed and, after an unspecified acquaintance got the officers a gun, she was released without charge.

Another interviewee, whom the *Guardian* calls Young OG, recounted a similar story. An officer showed him packets of heroin and threatened “it’s going to be yours before the night’s over if you don’t cooperate with us.” OG reported he was released without charge after having a friend leave a gun for the police in a garbage can.

A third man, Brock Terry, claimed to have been secretly held without charge after being caught with marijuana. “Every day they came to ask some questions,” Terry told the *Guardian*. “Am I in a gang? Who am I with? Who run this? Who run that? Give them a gun and they’ll let me go. That was pretty much the main thing: give them a gun and they’ll let me go.”

The picture painted by those who have come forward is one of unrestrained criminality on the part of the police. The police department has responded to the allegations with *pro forma* denials. According to a March 1 statement released by the CPD, “The allegation that physical violence is part of interviews with suspects is unequivocally false, it is offensive, and it is not supported by any facts whatsoever.”

The CPD however, has a long history of the widespread use of torture, with the support of the city’s

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Democratic Party establishment. The revelations regarding Homan Square followed reporting from the *Guardian* that showed that one of the top torturers at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, Richard Zuley, had honed his techniques extracting confessions for the CPD. The Homan allegations depict the same methods of being shackled in stress positions, sexual assaults and beatings that Zuley used against detainees in the so-called War on Terror.

Zuley was far from the first torturer in the CPD. From 1972 to 1991, former police commander Jon Burge was involved in the regular use of torture to extract confessions, sending many innocent victims to jail. Darrell Cannon for example, confessed to a murder after officers electrocuted his genitals with a cattle prod and subjected him to three mock executions. He then spent 24 years behind bars before having his case dismissed on appeal.

The city of Chicago recently authorized a $5.5 million restitution fund to victims of Burge's torture, with a maximum payout to any individual of $100,000. Absurdly, Democratic Mayor Rahm Emanuel claimed that the fund would "bring this dark chapter of Chicago's history to a close." In comparison to the meager restitution to torture victims, Chicago spent $20 million on the legal defense of Burge and the officials who shielded him from prosecution like former mayor Richard M. Daley.

Far from punishing the perpetrators, the Democratic Party has consistently shielded and rewarded them. Daley, as Cook County's state's attorney, refused to prosecute Burge before the statute of limitations ran out. Similarly, Nicholas Roti, the chief of the Bureau of Organized Crime (including the narcotics division) in the CPD, whose department operates in Homan Square, resigned in early March, not in shame over the torture allegations, but in order to become chief of staff for the Illinois state police.

Like Zuley, Burge has a direct connection with US imperialism, having been a military police trainer at an interrogation camp during the Vietnam War, but there is a deeper connection between America's wars abroad and its increasingly militarized domestic police. The financial interests dictating US foreign policy that demand foreign wars to shore up falling profits also demand savage cuts to the living standards of Americans for the same reason. Neither program, the looting of the Middle East's oil or the panoply of austerity measures, can be implemented democratically. They demand a brutal apparatus of oppression, which both the Democrats as well as Republicans oversee.

In the lead-up to the April runoff election, neither Emanuel nor his "progressive" opponent, Democrat Jesus "Chuy" Garcia, had any criticism for the CPD regarding the growing revelations of brutality and abuse. In fact, Garcia called for the hiring of 1,000 more officers. Cook County, where Chicago is located, has already received 1,700 pieces of equipment from the military.

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