

New revelations of violence at Chicago police “black site”

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According to documents obtained through a lawsuit by the British *Guardian* newspaper, Chicago police used various forms of physical violence against detainees held at the secret interrogation center in Homan Square, which has been described as the domestic equivalent of a CIA “black site.” At least 14 men were victims of violence by Chicago Police Department (CPD) officers.

Last year, the department strenuously denied all allegations in a series of *Guardian* reports exposing the secret site and the conditions of inmates detained there. The CPD stated in March 2015, “The allegation that physical violence is a part of interviews with suspects is unequivocally false, it is offensive, and it is not supported by any facts whatsoever.” The CPD would only admit that it used the facility for “interviews” as part of a low-level narcotics outpost.

However, the lawsuit filed by the newspaper and the documents obtained from it about the Homan Square facility contradict these official statements denying any misconduct against prisoners held at the facility. The documents reveal that police officers used punches, Tasers, knee strikes, strangulation, elbow strikes, and baton blows, among other forms of abuse against detainees.

One person also died under police custody in circumstances that have not been explained. The family and friends had an independent autopsy conducted that contradicted the official autopsy performed by Cook County. The family believes that police killed the man and covered it up.

According to the documents, even though none of the men fled custody, they were assaulted after they had been brought to the detention center. The documents include forms marking the use of force by the police and hospitalization records. The forms are evaluated for

review by higher-ranking officers. In all cases obtained, the superior officers found no misconduct and stated that use of force was justified.

Police officers beat some detainees at the site so badly they required hospitalization for severe physical injuries. Detainees stated they experienced severe pain, impairment and post-traumatic stress that lasted years.

Dwand Ivery, 22 years old, was arrested on drug distribution charges and was held in Homan Square and severely beaten. He told the *Guardian* that the beating left him with a “deformed face,” lack of vision in his left eye, and severe mental health issues that required medication for “anxiety and depression.”

Mark Rideaux, another detainee, stated he was choked and strangled with a flex cuff tied around his neck. When Rideaux was taken to Mount Sinai hospital, he was told by the police that he had better “keep his mouth shut” or suffer the consequences. Rideaux was then taken to the Cook County Jail where he is currently serving a narcotics sentence. A civil lawsuit brought against the jail last year noted that detainees are in “extreme risk of harm” and that a “culture of brutality” is encouraged by the jail leadership. At least a quarter of inmates suffer from severe mental illnesses.

More than 7,000 people were “disappeared” at Homan Square since the last decade, according to a report from the *Guardian* last year. Their detentions went unreported to family, friends and defense attorneys. Documents prior to 2004, however, have not been disclosed, as the CPD claimed that they were “burdensome” to produce. The police have been using the facility since 1995, when they officially purchased the warehouse.

At least 65 percent of the arrests and detentions by the police in the last decade took place after Democrat

Rahm Emanuel became mayor of Chicago in 2011. Previous reports and testimonies from detainees alleged that they were also tortured and sexually assaulted. Emanuel has defended the department's work in Homan Square, stating that the police "follow all the rules" at the interrogation center.

However, the majority of people who are detained at the former Sears warehouse in Homan Square are rarely provided access to an attorney or a phone call to their family and friends. The internal records of the police showed that hundreds were detained and arrested illegally without any charges. Fewer than 1 percent of those arrested are provided access to a lawyer, in keeping with more widespread undemocratic police department procedures.

The CPD responded to the recent *Guardian* revelations about the Homan Square facility and stated: "The Chicago Police Department takes allegations of excessive force very seriously. In Chicago, all use-of-force cases require extensive documentation using the tactical response report. These cases are then vigorously investigated by an external, civilian-led agency known as the Chicago Independent Police Review Authority (IPRA). We stand behind our initial statement and our unwavering commitment to the highest levels of accountability and professional standards for our officers."

In fact, the IPRA has been shown to be entirely complicit in police brutality. In more than eight years, the so-called independent police review has rarely sustained a complaint against a police officer. Over the last five years, of the 400 police shootings in Chicago, the IPRA has found only one to be "not justified."

The local media and the political establishment have largely remained silent about the revelations of police brutality in Homan Square. Chicago has a long history of police violence and torture, with the full complicity of the entire political establishment. The most notorious cases of torture occurred under former police commander Jon Burge from 1972 to 1991. Victims of Burge were often brutally coerced into giving wrongful confessions of murder.

While current mayor Rahm Emanuel has stated that he is seeking to "reform" the police, in the wake of protests against police murders in the city, the ongoing revelations of police violence in Homan Square expose such pretenses. Emanuel's current choice to head the

police department also previously played a large role in the crackdown of protesters at the NATO Summit in Chicago in 2012.

Far from "reforming" the police force, the operation of an illegal torture center in a major metropolitan city wracked by social inequality highlights the breakdown of democratic forms of rule under capitalism today. The attacks on democratic rights, rampant police brutality and torture are increasingly the response of the ruling elite to suppress all forms of social and political opposition.



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