

Clayton County, Georgia sheriff indicted on federal criminal charges for brutalizing detainees

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Long-time Clayton County, Georgia, Sheriff Victor Hill was charged with four criminal offenses by a federal grand jury this month for brutalizing four detainees last year. Hill, who styles himself as a nonsense “law and order” sheriff, has been charged with abusing the civil rights of four detainees by ordering them to be strapped in restraining chairs for hours on end despite these individuals being fully cooperative and posing no threat.

Clayton County includes the southern suburbs of Atlanta and is the location of Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, the second busiest airport in the world.

The indictment against Sheriff Hill was unsealed on April 19 and he appeared in federal district court in Atlanta on Tuesday to plead not guilty. Hill is continuing to act as sheriff despite the indictment.

According to federal prosecutors, Hill directed his deputies to leave the four inmates, during different periods in 2020, tightly strapped to a restraining chair for long hours because either these detainees were deemed not submissive enough or Hill felt they were not respectful enough towards him.

One of the detainees, according to the indictment, was restrained for such a long duration and denied permission to go to the bathroom, that he urinated on himself.

Hill has also been accused of using his police force to intimidate and then arrest a landscaper identified as G.H. by sending a heavily armed squad of his deputies. The landscaper reportedly had engaged in an argument with a nearby Butts County deputy for non-payment of a bill for work the landscaper had performed at the deputy’s home.

After learning of this dispute, Hill called the landscaper, identifying himself as the Clayton County Sheriff, and asked why G.H. was “harassing his deputy.” Subsequently Sheriff Hill seems to have cooked up an unrelated misdemeanor “harassing communication” charge against the landscaper to arrest him. G.H. had placed several calls to Sheriff Hill using FaceTime in order to verify if it was indeed the Clayton County sheriff who had called him about a billing dispute.

Reflecting the all-too-common trait among leading police officials of unrestrained arrogance and a feeling of possessing untrammelled powers, Hill was quoted in the indictment as shouting at two of the victims using crude language to threaten even more torture.

“I’m a sit your ass in that chair for sixteen hours straight. Do you understand me? I need to hear from both of y’all that y’all not gonna show y’all’s ass in my county no more.”

Each of the detainees have stated that their abusive treatment by Hill “caused physical pain and resulted in bodily injury.”

The latest revelation of wanton police abuse comes in the midst of a spate of police killings which have sparked popular protests just within the first four months of this year. This includes the cold-blooded execution of 13-year-old Adam Toledo on March 29 by a Chicago police officer and at least 265 other police killings as of April 14 throughout the US. The victims are invariably youth or workers, especially those that are socially deprived and suffering mental health issues.

This is not the first time that police in Clayton County have been caught meting out brutal treatment. Last September a deputy working under Hill was fired after

he and his partner were caught on camera brutally beating 26-year-old Roderick Walker.

Hill's attorney Drew Findling expressed his outrage, accusing the Department of Justice of prosecuting his client for politically motivated reasons. According to Findling the injuries were mild and do not merit any scrutiny because they were not brutal enough.

"Sheriff Victor Hill is a beloved sheriff in his county. He is an anti-crime person. He wins overwhelming elections and the fact that these four innocuous allegations are the causation of a criminal case sends mixed messages from the Department of Justice," Findling stated. Continuing, he claimed, "There are no physical injuries involved. Other cases that receive this type of indictment involve brutal injuries and crimes—there is nothing like that here."

According to Findling, the investigation was initiated by the Trump administration after Sheriff Hill refused to house undocumented individuals arrested by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Clayton County jails. Sheriff Hill purportedly did this because of his concern that the constitutional rights of those arrested by ICE would be violated.

This picture of Hill as a great defender of basic constitutional rights flies in the face of the utter contempt he is documented to have displayed towards one of the detainees last year.

The federal indictment cites the following assault on one of the detainees, identified as J.A., that took place in February 2020.

J.A. was arrested without incident for assaulting two women during a dispute at a grocery store in Clayton County. When he was brought for booking, Hill asked him what he was doing in Clayton County since it was not his place of residence. The detainee responded by saying: "It's a democracy, sir. It's the United States."

"No, it's not, not in my county," responded Hill, according to the indictment.

When J.A. asked the Sheriff if he was not entitled to a fair and speedy trial, Hill allegedly stated, "You're entitled to sit in this chair, and you're entitled to get the hell out of my county and don't come back. That's what you're entitled to. You sound like a damn jackass..."

Far from this prosecution being a case of the US Department of Justice (DOJ) concerned for mitigating rampant police abuse or for protecting detainees'

constitutional rights, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which has overseen the Hill inquiry, revealed another motivation—to restore trust in law enforcement.

Christopher Macrae, the FBI assistant special agent in charge, explained, "Sheriff Hill is alleged to have abused his privileges and abandoned his responsibilities and *the FBI is committed to restoring trust in law enforcement by holding him accountable* " (emphasis added).

Former federal prosecutor Bret Williams told 11 Alive, "the case will be difficult to prove, even if prosecutors have video from inside the jail." In other words, Hill will more than likely be let off scot free just like most of the police personnel who are prosecuted.

The claim of the Democratic Party and the mainstream media that racism explains police violence, and it can be mitigated by increasing the number of minorities on police forces and in leadership, is belied in this latest example of police abuse. Sheriff Hill is in fact the first African American elected to lead the Clayton County Sheriff's Department.

The police are "the special bodies of armed men" used by the ruling elite to protect their property interests and compel workers and youth to accept their exploitation even while the capitalists pursue policies to further the already obscene enrichment of the super-rich.

Only by overturning the capitalist system can the unending reign of police violence and murder be ended. This requires the mobilization of the masses under the leadership of the working class for socialism not just in the US but worldwide.



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