

“Rough ride” in police van leaves New Haven, Connecticut, man paralyzed

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On June 19, Randy Cox, a 36-year-old African American resident of New Haven, Connecticut, suffered severe spinal injuries when the police van transporting him to jail, stopped suddenly and catapulted him headfirst into the steel cage wall of the vehicle. He was handcuffed and without a seatbelt.

Much of the incident has been caught on police video camera, which the city has released to the public, although the city has withheld about two hours of footage.

Weeks later, Cox, after two neck operations, remains intubated and paralyzed. The “rough ride” of detainees is a common type of police torture in the United States.

Cox’s injuries were almost certainly exacerbated afterward by the cops, who, even though Cox told them he could not move, dragged him out of the van and forced him to sit up in a wheelchair. As they were processing him, they even made him listen to and sign off on a pre-recorded statement about sexual harassment. They then dragged him into a cell, where he lay, with his paralyzed ankles handcuffed together, until paramedics arrived.

Cox’s case immediately recalls the case of Freddie Gray who was murdered by police in a similar case of a “rough ride” in a police van in Baltimore in 2015. Gray’s murder sparked mass protests against police brutality. The treatment meted out to Cox is also reminiscent of the Gray killing in another way: It was an assault by the police in a city run by the Democratic Party, in the case of Baltimore the administration of Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake and in New Haven, Mayor Justin Elicker.

Cox’s family held a press conference on the steps of the New Haven Courthouse on June 28, where attorney Ben Crump who has worked on numerous cases of police abuse, including that of George Floyd, murdered

by police in Minneapolis in 2020, announced he would be representing Cox.

Crump called Cox’s situation “the Freddie Gray case on video.” He suggested that videos that had not yet been released by the city would prove even more shocking.

At a public meeting held by the Connecticut NAACP on the same evening, attended by several hundred people, Scott X. Esdaile, the organization’s state president, said, “People from the community have been coming to us for years talking about how they torture people in the back of paddy wagons. They put individuals in the paddy wagons, they go real fast and they slam on the brakes.”

Cox was participating in a Father’s Day-Juneteenth block party on Lilac Street, in the working class Newhallville neighborhood of New Haven when he was arrested.

Officers from the New Haven Police Department arrived at the event around 7:30 p.m. after they allegedly received a weapons complaint. Police body cams show several cops surrounding and frisking Cox who offered no resistance. A cell phone and a pint bottle of liquor Cox was holding were taken from him and a handgun removed from his waistband. He was immediately cuffed and placed under arrest, charged with possession of a firearm, carrying a pistol without a permit, second degree threatening, and second-degree breach of peace. Another body cam video clip released by the city, shows him being put into a police van for transport to jail. Cox remained co-operative.

The next video clip made available to the public shows Cox, arms handcuffed behind his back, raising himself up off the floor of the narrow, restrictive, prisoner cage inside the van and easing himself onto a bench that runs the length of the cage. He kicked at the

steel wall opposite the bench and then, in an instant, the camera captures him pitching forward and slamming head-first into the steel dividing wall separating the cage from the cab of the vehicle.

The New Haven police say the van's driver, Officer Oscar Diaz, was forced to brake to avoid colliding with another vehicle and that the sudden braking led to Cox's being injured. Video intended to provide proof of this is inconclusive.

What is conclusive is the mocking, demeaning and indifferent way the cop treated Cox, who for the remainder of the trip to the jail, lay in agony, squeezed in between the bench and the cage wall, unable to move, and pleading over and over again for help. When Diaz, who can clearly see his prisoner in a video monitor in the cab, finally pulled over purportedly to physically check on Cox, it was only to taunt the man further from the open door of the cage.

Police regulations state that at the point a prisoner is injured in a vehicle, the driver is supposed to immediately pull over and make an ambulance call. Diaz told Cox he was going to call an ambulance but instead closed the cage door and proceeded to the jail, radioing a police dispatcher and requesting an ambulance be sent to meet him there.

Body cam videos capture the criminal disregard shown to Cox in lock-up by his jailers, who took the word of Diaz and treated the severely injured man like they would a drunk, actions that would be despicable regardless.

In total, five officers are being investigated by the city and have been put on administrative leave.

According to the *New Haven Register*, LaToya Boomer, Cox's sister, said after seeing the video, "Where's the first aid training? Where's the on-the-job training? Where's the accountability? I want to know, where's the person that sees what's going on and says, 'maybe he's not joking, maybe he's not drunk, maybe he's in distress.'"

Injury and death at the hands of the police are a commonplace in the United States. Barely a week after Randy Cox's "rough ride," Akron, Ohio, resident Jayland Walker was executed by eight cops who riddled the young man's body with over 60 bullets after a routine traffic stop. Peaceful protests over this heinous crime have been met with tear gas, baton charges, and arrests. A friend of Jayland Walker's

fiancée, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "They are not protecting and serving, they are hunting and killing us."

During the protests that have followed the killing of Walker, the police have reputedly rioted, beating demonstrators, arresting them without cause and firing tear-gas cannisters at pointblank range.

At a rally in New Haven earlier this month, following a two-mile march ending at a police station, Randy Cox's brother, Jeff Brown of Tallahassee, Florida, responded with contempt toward the changes Democratic Mayor Justin Elicker has promised, including an order clarifying that police cruisers should be the primary means of transporting a prisoner, and that police vans should only carry prisoners under certain circumstances along with the requirement that police inquire whether a person requires medical attention both when they are arrested and when they arrive at a detention facility. "I heard the mayor and the police chief," he said. "I read they're going to do a 'new initiative' and institute 'some new procedures.' What we want is some goddamn accountability!"

According to media reports, one marcher summed up the mood of the protesters: "They keep telling us to be peaceful," she said. "No. We are non-violent, but we are not peaceful ... Not peaceful, not calm. We are outraged!"

Meanwhile Randy Cox still lies in a hospital bed where his sister, LaQuavius LeGrant, told the media, "The man can't eat. He can't sleep, he can't talk, he can't breathe. He can't do anything, at all, but cry. He cries every time we come there—and all we do is cry."



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