

Eight murder convictions overturned due to Chicago police corruption and torture

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Last week, the Cook County State's Attorney's office in Illinois asked judges to overturn eight murder convictions, in what their attorneys believe to be one of the first mass exonerations in the United States. They were victims of Chicago police detective Reynaldo Guevara, who has been under investigation for torture, submitting false confessions and manufacturing evidence. Scores of murder convictions involving Guevara, dating from 1989 to 1994, have now been overturned.

Of those who had their sentences vacated, all but one has reportedly been released from prison. These eight follow 24 other exonerations involving Guevara and three more are expected in the coming weeks, according to Cook County State's Attorney Kim Foxx, for a total of 35 convictions thrown out related to the detective.

In a formal statement, Foxx said her office "no longer believes in the validity of these convictions or the credibility of the evidence. We can no longer stand by these convictions."

Foxx said that her office has not actively pursued charges against Guevara yet, and noted that Guevara had repeatedly pleaded the Fifth Amendment right not to incriminate himself, "and then when asked questions, was not truthful."

Earlier this year, a report from the National Registry of Exonerations placed Illinois at the very top of the list in overturning false convictions in 2021. The state logged 38 exonerations that year, 20 more than any other state. The state has been number one in the United States for exonerations four years running.

On their release, some of the exonerated spoke not only to Guevara's criminal role as an individual, but to the role of the corruption and violence of the Chicago Police Department as a whole and, by implication, the State's Attorney's office.

"I'm asking Kim Foxx to press charges, to pursue the prosecution of not only of Guevara, but the CPD agents that helped him," said Nelson Gonzalez, who was wrongfully imprisoned for 23 years, according to CBS Chicago. "They

created chaos within many families. We aren't going to stop. We're going to keep pushing."

The exonerated prisoners also spoke of the life and experiences stolen from them and from their families by the misconduct.

Marilyn Mulero spent 28 years in prison for a crime she did not commit before her release this month. She was wrongfully convicted of a 1992 double murder in Chicago after 20 hours of interrogation by Guevara and his partner, Ernest Halvorson, in which she was threatened and denied access to an attorney. In addition to coercing a confession, the detectives fabricated evidence, according to the Illinois Innocence Project. At 21, Mulero, a mother of two young children, had been framed for murder and was sentenced to death, spending five years on death row.

"I had to be a strong individual because I had two toddlers when I was incarcerated. I had to fight for them. I had to be strong for them. There's other women out there that are incarcerated, that are innocent, that I will keep fighting for, just like our other Guevara victims that are in there," she explained at a press conference on August 9.

Mulero is the 22nd person to have been exonerated in Illinois after receiving a death sentence.

The city of Chicago has paid about \$37 million in settlements related to Guevara's misconduct, according to CBS. Guevara, who retired in 2005, is collecting two public pensions and living in Texas, and, to date, no charges have been filed against him. According to Foxx's office, the city of Chicago has spent \$500 million on police misconduct settlements in recent years.

Cook County State's Attorney Foxx appeared on "Roland Martin Unfiltered," a YouTube news program, and spoke euphemistically about Guevara's activities. She said he worked on the West Side in the Humboldt Park neighborhood "when homicide rates were astronomical."

She went on, "The reason he could solve cases no one else could solve was because he was cutting corners, coercing confessions, manipulating evidence, and he was, essentially,

for lack of a better term, hemming people up.”

She said the exonerations followed a 2013 investigative report her disgraced predecessor, Anita Alvarez, refused to act on for years. While saying nothing about the source of the systemic corruption and violent abuse—the capitalist social and economic system—Foxx explained her intention is to improve the relationship between the police and city residents, “You cannot have public safety without meaningful justice reform.”

Seeking to present Guevara’s misconduct as the result of racism, Foxx said, “Because crime was so bad, and because these were Latino men and women, he was able to over the course of about 10 years, send a number of people to prison based on evidence we would never use in a trial today.”

Towards the end of the segment the host, Martin, noted that this was not just a “white cop” issue in Chicago, and spoke to the widespread hatred and mistrust of police in the city due to the rampant abuses, including corruption and torture by cops regardless of their race.

In addition to Guevara, who is Hispanic, Martin named Ronald Watts, an African American police detective, who with Kallatt Mohammed and numerous others who have not been prosecuted, terrorized the Ida B. Wells Housing Project, operating their own crime ring, planting “evidence” and coercing confessions. They were not convicted until 2012.

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Jon Loevy, an attorney representing the Watts-related frame-up victims, said last Friday of the Watts crew: “They were not only running a protection racket where they were charging people money to not arrest them, but they themselves were involved in the drug trade. And they were stealing money and drugs. And then they were reselling them. So to keep that going, and to enable them to be able to pull this off, they were putting false cases on people, anybody who got in their way.”

Last April, Cook County Presiding Judge Erica Reddick vacated 44 Watts-related prison sentences, bringing the total to 212 exonerations related to Watts’s misconduct.

Chicago’s history of police torture and corruption goes back many decades. From 1972 to 1991, former Chicago Police Detective, later Commander, Jon Burge and his team tortured at least 118 people into making confessions for violent crimes on Chicago’s South Side. Prosecutors and judges ignored years of complaints of torture. Former Democratic Mayor Richard M. Daley, the Cook County State’s Attorney during Burge’s tenure, was accused by the Illinois General Assembly of refusing to act on information he had regarding Burge’s team’s abuses. Burge, like

Guevara, continued to receive a police pension until his death in 2018. Burge spent four years in prison for lying under oath about the torture, before retiring to Apollo Beach, Florida, to operate a fishing business.

The abuse continues to the present day, with the full backing of the Democratic Party. In 2015, the *Guardian* uncovered the Chicago Police Department’s “black site” in a former Sears warehouse in Homan Square, where more than 7,000 people were illegally “disappeared,” held and interrogated in the years between 2005 and 2015. More than 65 percent of detentions in that facility took place during the terms of former Mayor Rahm Emanuel, who left his role as chief of staff for President Barack Obama to take Daley’s spot as mayor of Chicago.

The massive Cook County Jail has been targeted for protests over an increased number of deaths since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Cassandra Greer-Lee lost her husband, 42-year old Nickolas Lee, after he was infected with COVID and neglected in the jail. “My husband died of pure negligence. He walked into the Cook County Jail a healthy 42-year-old man, and he left out in a body bag.” Greer-Lee told Yahoo! News she called the jail 132 times for information about her husband and none of the calls were answered.

On the intolerable jail conditions she said: “You have people back there that have been there for nine, 10 years. People are sick back there. They’re not getting health care. It’s rodents, and they don’t have the things that they need, like everyday essentials. I’m not saying this has to be like a Holiday Inn or a suite, but soap, sanitizing products and tissue—you shouldn’t have to beg for those things.”

In another indication of the brutality of American society and decay of social services, the jail has become the place people experiencing mental health crises are brought to, following decades of cuts and closures to hospitals and clinics.



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