

America's barbarous prisons: A daily crime against humanity

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Sickening images released in the last week concerning the deaths of two inmates trapped in America's gulag, the largest prison population in the world, have outraged millions of people in the US and internationally.

Lashawn Thompson, a 35-year-old black man, died in the Fulton County Jail in Atlanta, Georgia on September 12, 2022. Photos released by the family attorney last week show Thompson's body covered with insects and lesions before he died in the jail.

Joshua McLemore, a 29-year-old white man who was previously diagnosed with schizophrenia, starved to death in the Jackson County Jail in southern Indiana in August 2021. In a lawsuit filed last week, a lawyer for the family revealed that for nearly 20 days, McLemore was kept in solitary confinement despite displaying no aggressive behavior.

These two cases, representative of the thousands of cases of abuse, torture and outright murder in US prisons every year, refute the cynical and hypocritical claims proffered by President Joe Biden and the Democratic and Republican parties that capitalist America is a bastion of "freedom" and "human rights." The emaciated corpses of McLemore and Thompson, left to rot in deplorable, inhuman cells, are not aberrations, but the daily reality of the American capitalist gulag.

The initial article about these two cases on the WSWs won a wide audience, with nearly 100,000 readers in less than a week. These readers were responding not only to the exposure of shocking atrocities, but to the stark contrast between the official US posturing about human rights and the reality facing working people.

The courageous and award-winning Australian journalist John Pilger commented on the disturbing

photos this past weekend on Twitter: "Look, and recoil at, the photos below. They were taken in the barbaric prison system to which the UK and US and Australia conspire to send Julian Assange, an innocent man whose only 'crime' is real journalism."

Similarly, human rights lawyer and environmental activist Steven Donziger characterized the treatment of Thompson as "state-sanctioned torture."

It is entirely possible, and even likely, that had the families of the deceased not been able to retain competent legal counsel these horrors would never have been revealed. In both instances, images detailing the torture both men endured while incarcerated were released as part of lawsuits, either ongoing or in preparation.

Neither man had been convicted of a crime. They were "innocent until proven guilty" when they died. Despite the fact that both men deteriorated physically and mentally and were denied medical care, no charges have been filed against any jailers, and in the case of McLemore, the district attorney has already ruled out criminal charges.

Thompson was a 35-year-old Florida native who "loved Atlanta," according to his brother, Brad McCrae. While sleeping on a park bench on June 12, 2022, Thompson was arrested on a simple misdemeanor battery charge, according to a Georgia Tech police report. The charge stemmed from Thompson allegedly spitting at a cop, who transported him to the Fulton County Jail where he would die three months later.

While Thompson was incarcerated in the "mental health" wing of the Fulton County Jail, photos released by Michael D. Harper, a lawyer for Thompson's family, showed him abandoned in a disgusting cell full of insects that proceeded to "eat him alive." The

disturbing photos released by Harper show Thompson covered in sores, insects and lesions. Thompson's cell was filthy with grime and refuse, "unfit for a diseased animal," the lawyer said.

Commenting on the decision to publicly release the disturbing photos, Thompson's brother Brad McCrae invoked the memory of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old black teen from Chicago who was murdered in 1955 for the "crime" of supposedly talking with a white woman. "It's heartbreaking," McCrae said in an interview with the *Washington Post*. "The pictures are really awful, they're hard to look at."

While the conditions Thompson endured before he died were outrageous and disgusting, they were not unique to Fulton County or exceptional in the US prison system. Inmates are among the most exploited and mistreated populations in American society, subject to everything from being denied medical care to being forced to carry out virtual slave-labor for major corporations while incarcerated.

Just over a year before Thompson was found dead in his cell, Joshua McLemore, a 29-year-old white man who suffered from schizophrenia, died after being starved to death in the Jackson County, Indiana, jail.

Suffering from severe psychosis after consuming methamphetamine, McLemore was in the emergency room when an off-duty police officer witnessed him grab the hair of a nurse, at which point the cop charged him with assault. He was hauled off to the Jackson County Jail and placed in an isolation cell.

While he was in "Padded Cell 7" at Jackson County, a windowless cell that did not have a bed, McLemore's condition continued to worsen. In the course of 20 days, McLemore was alone in the cell, the fluorescent lights were kept on 24 hours a day, and the door to the bathroom was locked, forcing the ailing man to relieve himself on the same floor on which he slept and ate. An investigation by the state police found that during the more than 400 hours he was locked up in solitary confinement, McLemore rarely ate or drank, losing nearly 45 pounds.

Despite having been previously diagnosed with schizophrenia, and arrested at a hospital, McLemore was never given a basic medical intake exam by the jail staff, who never even photographed or fingerprinted him. But an "investigation" last year by Jackson County Prosecutor Jeffery Chalfant found "that no

crimes were committed by employees of the Jackson County Jail related to the death of Joshua A McLemore."

The lawsuits and photos in these cases have further exposed the sprawling US prison system, with over two million current inmates, for what it really is: a barbarous, inhumane and cruel system that tortures and kills working class, mentally unwell and poor people unfortunate enough to end up trapped within its confines.

How can a government that covers up and condones the brutal torture of its most vulnerable and unwell citizens claim to be fighting for "freedom" in Ukraine or anywhere else in the world? The fact is, as millions of people throughout the Middle East, Africa and Asia know, US government intervention is not a harbinger of peace and human rights, but terror, exploitation and death.

The images released in the last week, reminiscent of the Abu Ghraib torture photos, are an embarrassment for the US ruling class. As was the case then, President Joe Biden and the rest of the Democratic Party are silent on the deaths of these inmates because it exposes their "social justice" rhetoric as a fraudulent defense of the capitalist state.

The silence of the Democratic Party demonstrates that 20 years after the Iraq war, the abuse and torture that became official policy under the Bush administration overseas have been brought to the "homeland" by both big business parties, to be used against the American working class and class-conscious opponents of US imperialism.

Unfortunately for the financial oligarchy, history is not on its side. There is not a prison big enough in the world to contain the colossal growth of the class struggle, which provides the objective foundation for the global socialist movement that will put an end to mass incarceration and the capitalist police state.



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