

“Torture warehouse” exposed in lawsuits against Baton Rouge, Louisiana police department

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28 September 2023

Police in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, have been operating a secret torture warehouse, according to multiple lawsuits filed against the Baton Rouge Police Department. The City of Baton Rouge, the Parish of East Baton Rouge, Police Chief Murphy Paul and multiple officers are also defendants in the lawsuits.

The warehouse, known within the department as the “Brave Cave,” is an unmarked facility used by the Street Crimes Unit, formerly known by the acronym BRAVE for Baton Rouge Area Violence Elimination. Attorneys for the plaintiffs describe the facility as a domestic black site where detainees are routinely taken, “held incommunicado, denied counsel, and beaten.”

A complaint filed on behalf of Jeremy Lee, 21, states that Lee was arrested on January 9, 2023 without reasonable suspicion or probable cause, only being charged with “Resisting an Officer.” After handcuffing Lee and publicly stripping him down to his underwear, police took him to the warehouse where they repeatedly kicked and punched him, breaking one of his ribs. He was beaten so severely that the local jail refused to admit him until he received medical care. Throughout the incident, the police repeatedly turned off or muted their body cameras.

Two of the officers involved, Troy Lawrence Jr. and Matthew Wallace, are also defendants in a second lawsuit filed on behalf of Ternell Brown, 47.

During a traffic stop, Lawrence and Wallace searched Brown's car and found her medication. The officers falsely asserted that it was illegal to have multiple prescriptions in a single bottle. The officers ignored Brown's efforts to show them her prescriptions and proceeded to forcibly transport her to the warehouse where they and a female officer subjected her to

sexually humiliating body cavity searches. After detaining her there for two hours, they released Brown without charging her.

The complaint filing states that approximately 1,000 individuals have been taken to the warehouse and subjected to similar strip and body cavity searches in 2023 alone, hundreds of whom were released without formal arrest. Attorney Thomas Frampton, one of the lawyers representing both Brown and Lee, stated that his team has received dozens of other complaints about the facility and that additional lawsuits are forthcoming.

Baton Rouge officials are now in damage control. Democratic mayor-president Sharon Weston Broome, who claims to have been unaware of its existence, ordered the facility closed and the Street Crimes Unit disbanded after Lee's lawsuit was filed on August 29.

Police Chief Murphy Paul, who admitted his administration initially ignored complaints about the warehouse, stated he was so concerned by the recent revelations that he sought out the assistance of the FBI to ensure an “independent review” of the complaints. The FBI and other federal authorities confirmed they have launched a probe into the matter.

BRPD Deputy Chief Troy Lawrence Sr., one of Paul's right-hand men, has been placed on paid administrative leave due to the investigation. He formerly headed the BRAVE unit and is the father of Lawrence Jr.—the former officer who is at the center of the abuse allegations. Lawrence Jr. has since been arrested and charged with battery in relation to a separate episode in which he used a stun-gun on a handcuffed man.

In a news conference shortly before the warehouse was closed, both Police Chief Paul and Deputy Chief

Myron Daniels denied there was anything secretive about the facility and that it had been used for two decades to process “thousands of suspects” and evidence for the narcotics division and other covert units.

Details in the lawsuit indicate a prolonged cover-up of the warehouse's operations, the Street Crimes Unit's abuses, and the brutality of the officers involved, especially Lawrence Jr.

In his short career, Lawrence Jr. was suspended at least three times for misconduct, according to the complaints. His brutality made national news in 2021 when he and other officers publicly strip-searched a 16-year-old and illegally searched the minor's mother's apartment. Despite the city settling a civil rights lawsuit for \$35,000 in this matter, an internal BRPD review cleared Lawrence of any wrongdoing and Chief Paul stated the strip search was consistent with the department's policy.

As to the operations of the Street Crimes Unit at the Brave Cave, these have long been known. In January 2023, shortly after Lee was tortured at the warehouse, his mother emailed Chief Paul to inform him of what was done to her son. According to the court filing, Paul personally called her to acknowledge receipt of the complaint. In April 2023, Internal Affairs also acknowledged receipt of a complaint filed by Lee.

Deputy Chief Myron Daniels is also business partners with the head of the now-disbanded Street Crimes Unit, Lorenzo Coleman. The two operate a security consulting firm together, with Daniels as President and Coleman as the Chief Operating Officer.

The revelations expose the fraudulent character of both the Democratic Party's pretensions of “police reform” and the racist explanations for police violence. The entire top brass of the Baton Rouge police, as well as the mayor and the former officer Lawrence Jr. are African American, with the police chief having been appointed in 2018 with promises of change following the police murder of Alton Sterling in 2016.

Police departments across the country have been repeatedly exposed for systematic abuses and operating secret interrogation sites. The existence of the torture warehouse in Baton Rouge underscores the intrinsic connection between the repressive character of the

police and the capitalist “justice system” as a whole with the criminal operations of US imperialism abroad, which operates barbaric black sites throughout the world. Facing growing opposition to social inequality and to the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, the American state will increasingly use the methods it has pioneered abroad to violently suppress the working class at home.



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