

“Goon Squad” of Mississippi sheriff deputies carried out campaign of terror and torture

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For almost twenty years, an extrajudicial campaign of terror was carried out in Rankin County, Mississippi, east of the state capital Jackson, by a team of sheriff deputies operating completely without restraint and outside of the law. These officers, some of whom are only now being reprimanded and facing criminal charges, were invading homes and torturing suspected drug users and drug dealers while covering up their crimes with falsified police reports.

A series of articles published late last year in the *New York Times* exposed years of abuse from Rankin deputies on drug addicts and alleged dealers in the area. Spanning back as far as 2009 and earlier, numerous incidents of beatings, home invasions, and water board torture were carried out by a team of deputies calling themselves the “Goon Squad.” Mississippians were pistol whipped, beaten with clubs, had legs broken and teeth knocked out by this band of brutal thugs.

Numerous victims and witnesses have come forward in the last few months with dozens of corroborated stories laying out a trend of abuse and torment. Narcotics detectives and officers barged into homes, handcuffed residents and beat them into confessing drug use or dealing, often forcing them to name other drug users or dealers, setting them up for torture and arrest. Some were released with heavy fines, others given lengthy prison sentences and even some were charged with no crime at all.

As similar stories continued to emerge, it became clear the abuse was not limited to a few “bad apples” in the department but revealed widespread violence and cover ups. Officials within the department failed for years to investigate complaints of police brutality and allowed officers free rein to carry out their campaign of terror in the name of the “War on Drugs.” When reached for comment last November as the allegations

were coming to light, Rankin County Sheriff Bryan Bailey told the *Times*, “I have 240 employees, there’s no way I can be with them each and every day.”

Among the victims that have come forward with testimony is Christopher Hillhouse, age 19 at the time of his attack. Hillhouse alleges police set him up to purchase drugs from a dealer by giving him cash and following him to a drug deal. Knowing it was a set up, Hillhouse spent the money at a discount store and was shortly after taken by police to his family’s home.

According to Hillhouse’s mother, officers barged into the home with no warrant and handcuffed the teenager. Officers then proceeded to beat him with punches to the stomach and face, at one point striking his head with a flashlight and knocking out one of his teeth. He was then taken to a police van and beaten for several more hours before being released without charge.

In another incident in 2010, Dustin Hale, 17, was beaten, tased, and arrested at a house party with friends. He was then taken to an interrogation room at the jail where he was beaten again and tased repeatedly.

In a 2016 incident, officers invaded the home of Samuel Carter, 64, on suspicions of drug use and a drug overdose. Officers broke into the house with no warrant and handcuffed Carter and a visitor in the home, Christopher Holloway. The two men were each beaten and shocked with tasers by officers demanding the location of their alleged drug stash. According to police records, Deputy James Rayborn triggered his taser six times for 20 seconds during the arrest.

In 2018, Robert Wayne Jones and an associate were arrested outside of his trailer park home and driven to a wooded area where they were both beaten and tased. Jones was then thrown into a creek and tased repeatedly in the water. The officers, suspecting he had swallowed drugs to hide them, shoved a night stick into his throat

until he threw up blood. In his mug shot photo signs of abuse were clearly visible on his face.

According to official taser reports logged by police officials, Rankin deputies used their tasers above and beyond average use for similar-sized counties. Along with dozens of mug shot photos showing clear signs of violence not listed in police reports, it is clear this “Goon Squad” was allowed to carry on their reign of terror with utmost impunity.

Another pattern that emerges in reviewing these incidents is the racial make-up of the victims and perpetrators. White, African-American and Hispanic Mississippians were all targeted for abuse and torture, further putting to lie the racialist narrative of police violence. Virtually every victim of Rankin County deputy sheriff violence was poor, working class or utterly destitute, the most brutalized and crushed down members of society no matter their race or gender.

A similar operation of overt police terror has been exposed in Louisiana, where it was revealed last year that police in Baton Rouge had a “torture warehouse” where suspected criminals were detained and beaten in a years-long series of abusive incidents, which were allowed to continue by the police department. And in Memphis, Tennessee, the city was compelled to disband its so-called Scorpion Unit last year after five officers were caught on video fatally beating 29-year-old FedEx worker Tyre Nichols.

Police in the US killed a record 1,232 people in 2023, more than three victims across the country every day. The recent discovery of 215 bodies buried in unmarked grave behind the Hinds County Penal Farm in Jackson has sparked further outrage at the abuse of those incarcerated in America’s jails and prisons.

The increasingly reactionary degeneration of the ruling capitalist class, finding one expression in the escalation of infringements on the basic democratic rights of workers and the impoverished by the police, is unfolding in the context of an expanding breakdown of democratic forms of bourgeois rule, reflected in the open use of genocide as state policy in the Middle East, itself an integral part of the global war drive by US imperialism and its NATO allies.

Trillions of dollars are made instantly available for war abroad, deepening social inequality in the process, with militaristic policing domestically employed by the ruling class to clamp down on opposition by the

working class and youth. The only answer to the question of police brutality at home and war crimes and genocide abroad is the intervention of the international working class against the capitalist profit system, protected and upheld by the police, the armed agents of the state.



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