

Bodycam footage shows New York state correction officers beating prisoner to death

Sandy English
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On Friday, the New York state attorney general's office released video footage showing correction officers at the Marcy Correctional Facility near Utica, New York, beating to death a handcuffed inmate, 43-year-old Robert Brooks.

The bodycams of four of the killers recorded the horrific incident, which has been broadly viewed in the United States and internationally. He was pronounced dead the next day. Preliminary autopsy findings indicate that he died from asphyxiation due to neck compression.

Thirteen correction officers and a prison nurse have been terminated from their jobs for the killing. The FBI and the state attorney general's office are investigating the incident, although as of this writing charges have not been brought against the guards.

In lying and insincere public statements, prominent state officials have expressed shock and horror at the killing. Democratic Governor Kathy Hochul said she was "outraged and horrified after seeing footage of the senseless killing." New York state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) head Daniel Martuscello told the media, "This type of behavior cannot be normalized, and I will not allow it to be within DOCCS."

Nevertheless, officials defended the New York state prison system. Attorney General Letitia James, who ordered the release of the bodycam footage, said Friday when the correction officers were fired:

I also want to make clear that this video and the conduct of these officers should not reflect poorly on the work and professionalism of the countless correction officers and correctional facility nurses throughout the state who go to work every day to protect and serve those in their care.

In reality, such brutality, while not always leading to death, is the norm in prisons at New York and nationally. The prison oversight group Correctional Association of New York has documented reports of widespread brutality inside the Marcy Correctional Facility.

This includes a 2016 riot by correction officers at the Marcy facility that began after guards thought, incorrectly, as it turned out, that one of their own had been assaulted by an inmate. According to Syracuse.com, "Guards ripped out phone lines. They blocked mail from going out." The guards also destroyed inmates' property, including legal papers.

According to the Syracuse.com, one inmate, Cole Bryant, said that "someone stomped on his back, kicked his ribs and yanked his head up, hurting his neck. The assault ended with a kick to his head to make sure he was looking down..."

The account continues: "That's when the officers turned their attention to Bryant's roommate, Raymond Broccoli, he said. Bryant could hear an officer taunt Broccoli: 'Here's how it feels to be helpless.'

"It wasn't until later that Broccoli told Bryant that an officer was sodomizing him with a metal object at the time of the taunt."

While the case went to court, no charges were ever brought against the correction officers because inmates were forced to lie on the floor at the time of the riot and could not identify the perpetrators.

The brutalization of human beings in the huge American prison gulag, with its nearly 2 million inmates, accounting for about 25 percent of the world's prisoners, is entirely routine.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted recently:

On November 26, the Virginia Legislative Black Caucus issued a statement declaring that since

September 15, at least 12 black men incarcerated at the [Red Onion] supermax facility had set themselves on fire in response to the degrading and inhumane conditions at the prison. The statement went on to say that people who have been locked up in Red Onion described “being regularly subjected to racial and physical abuse from correction officers, medical neglect, including the withholding of medicine, excessive stays in solitary confinement with one report of 600 consecutive days, inedible food having been covered with maggots and officers’ spit, and violent dog attacks.”

Where there is systemic degradation and torture, there is also murder. It is unknown how many prisoners are killed by correction officers either in New York state or nationally.

The Prison Policy Initiative noted on its blog this month that

rudimentary facts about the system are hard to come by: a lot of things are simply not tracked, and the data that do exist are often limited, inaccessibly formatted, fractured across thousands of jurisdictions, and/or severely outdated.

As the prisoners’ rights group Jailhouse Lawyers Speak noted on its Twitter/X feed in regard to the killing of Brooks:

These beatings by officials are happening in prisons AND jails all over the country EVERYDAY in EVERY STATE! Everyone knows this. Hell, they literally have legal torture chairs/beds and chemical weapons that are for wars to work against us.

Here is a small sample of the record of torture and beatings in New York state alone:

- The 2011 beating at Attica state prison in New York of inmate George Williams because he told a correction officer to shut up. The guards took a plea deal in 2015 and served no jail time.

- Correction officers Christopher Huggins and Michael Dorsainvil were found guilty in court of the March 2013 beating of inmate Carl Williams inside a holding cell at New York City’s Rikers Island prison complex.

- In 2015, Samuel Harrell died on April 22 at the Fishkill Correctional Facility in New York state after he was handcuffed, beaten, and thrown down a flight of stairs by a group of prison guards.

- In a federal lawsuit, Matthew Raymond, a prisoner at Auburn Correctional Facility in the Finger Lakes region of central New York, described being shackled, placed on a table and waterboarded by a lieutenant at the prison in 2016.

- In 2016, five prison guards, who ordered or participated in a merciless assault, were convicted for the July 2012 beating of inmate Jahmal Lightfoot at Rikers Island.

- In separate civil suits earlier this year, Charles Wright and Eugene Taylor, inmates at Green Haven Correctional Facility in Stormville, New York, described beatings, pepper spraying and waterboarding by correction officers.

The degrading and at times homicidal treatment of prisoners is only one aspect of a society in an advanced state of social decay. The forces of the capitalist state also operate where their victims are not confined to a cell, as in the police shooting of Derell Mickles (and bystanders) for failure to pay his subway fare in September. The promotion of militarism and fascistic views also fuels vigilante violence, as in the asphyxiation of the mentally ill and homeless Jordan Neely by ex-Marine Daniel Penny.

The Trump administration is preparing to vastly increase the number of people detained by the state—beginning with undocumented immigrant workers and their families—which will without question lead to an increase in abuse, including beatings, torture and murder.



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