

Dog bites and racism in Indianapolis

written by Stephen Millies

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Gordon Mitchum Sr., 78, of Indianapolis, a retired mail handler of 43 years, pulls up his left pant leg to show the scars left by an Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department dog bite, at his home on Monday, July 6, 2020.

Every five days, a police dog bites someone in Indianapolis. Just as Black people are twice as likely to be unemployed, 55 percent of those bitten in Indianapolis are African American. That's double their percentage of the city's population.

These and other facts were revealed in [a remarkable investigation by the Marshall Project](#), named for the human rights attorney and first Black U.S. Supreme Court justice, Thurgood Marshall.

Indianapolis K-9 Officer Molly Groce told tens of thousands of followers on Instagram that for her dog, "The bite itself is the reward." In 2018, Groce's dog bit Gordon Mitchum Sr. so severely that the Black retired postal worker's foot had to be in a cast for two months.

Mr. Mitchum spent 43 years helping people get their prescription medicines and other mail. He was resting on his porch when Groce and her dog entered the yard without a warrant through a side gate.

Police claimed they were looking for a carjacking suspect. They viciously attacked a man in his seventies.

Their K-9 dog first attacked Mitchum's left leg, then dragged him from the porch before biting his right foot. His daughter had to use bleach and water to hose the blood away from the family's patio and flowers.

Between 2017 and 2019, some 243 people were bitten by the K-9s of the Indianapolis Metro Police Department. Of the 11 people younger than 16 years old who were bit, nine were Black.

In 2015, an IMPD police dog veered away from a chase and suddenly attacked a woman who was seven months pregnant. She had to have several surgeries and went into labor early.

A remnant of slavery and fascism

Thousands of people have been bitten by police dogs across the United States. Bloodhounds were used to hunt enslaved Africans who had escaped from plantations. The liberator Nat Turner's hiding place was discovered by a dog.

The most famous scene in the novel “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” was Eliza escaping across a river from bloodhounds. During the Haitian Revolution, French slave owners had their dogs kill Black people.

In Montgomery, Ala. — the first capital of the slave owners’ confederacy — 51-year-old Joseph Lee Pettaway was mauled to death by a police dog in July 2018. Police Officer Nicholas Barber stood by and let the Black man bleed to death.

Pettaway was taking care of his 87-year-old mother in her house when he was killed. Montgomery authorities [refused for two years](#) to release any of the video evidence.

Nazis used dogs to patrol their concentration camps and kill inmates.

Dogs have to be specially trained to attack human beings. It isn’t natural for them.

It takes 12 weeks for Indianapolis police dogs to learn how. “We want the dog to first and foremost be able to hunt,” said IMPD Sgt. Craig Patton.

Of the biggest cities in the U.S., Indianapolis has the highest number of police dog bites per 100,000 people. Behind it are police forces in Jacksonville, Fla.; Houston; Denver; Phoenix; San Jose, Calif.; and San Diego.

In the same 2017 to 2019 period, more than 200 people were bitten by police dogs

in Los Angeles.

Police in Chicago, New York City, Philadelphia and San Francisco are just as vicious yet very few people are bitten there, which is more proof that all police K-9 units should be disbanded.

Why Indianapolis never had a Black mayor

Nearly three out of ten people in Indianapolis are African American. So why has Indiana's state capital never had a Black mayor?

For the same reasons that Indianapolis is the country's dog bite capital. Indiana may be the most reactionary state in the North.

Trump's lap dog, Vice President Mike Pence, is a former governor. The Ku Klux Klan controlled the state's Democratic and Republican parties throughout the 1920's.

At least ten African Americans were lynched in Indiana between 1890 and 1930. (African American Web Ring) Sixteen-year-old James Cameron was saved at the last minute from being hanged in Marion, Ind., on Aug. 7, 1930. His two companions had already been murdered by the mob.

After nearly being killed, Cameron still had to serve four years in prison for a crime he didn't commit. The only known survivor of a lynching, he later founded the Black Holocaust Museum in Milwaukee.

In 1993, Indiana Gov. Birch Bayh Jr. finally gave a pardon to James Cameron. Even in this case, there were no reparations. Cameron died in 2006.

Smothering the state was the Pulliam newspaper chain, which has since been sold off. The editorial pages of the family's Indianapolis Star and News were favorites of John Birch Society members. The Birch Society was founded in the Hoosier capital in

1958.

Billionaire patriarch Eugene Pulliam had enough clout in Indiana to make his doltish grandson, Dan Quayle, a U.S. senator. It was Quayle's open stupidity that made him so attractive to George Herbert Walker Bush as a running mate.

More than anything else in 1988, the first Bush needed impeachment insurance. Bush feared exposure as the ringleader of "contragate," whose centerpiece was the flooding by the CIA of Black communities with crack.

Another Indiana

It wasn't until 1965 that Indianapolis took part in the federal school lunch program. It was the last major city to do so. The Pulliam newspapers were furious.

The resistance of the Indianapolis capitalists to this minor concession was not just a matter of their reactionary and rotten character. It was also a sign of how their rule had been unchallenged for decades and how suppressed Indiana's working class had become.

Richard Hatcher's election on Nov. 7, 1967, as the first Black mayor of Gary, Ind., helped melt this deep freeze. The African American population in Indianapolis was growing rapidly. Would Indianapolis follow Gary's lead?

The response of the local ruling class was to set up a metropolitan government in 1970 called Unigov that would include all of Marion County. This deliberate diluting of the Black vote was an obvious violation of the Voting Rights Act. But Richard Nixon's attorney general and former law partner, John "Watergate" Mitchell, wasn't going to interfere.

Yet there's another Indiana. Terre Haute, Ind., was home to the socialist leader Eugene Debs. Until 1897, Indianapolis was the headquarters of the American

Federation of Labor.

In 1916, Debs ran for Congress on the Socialist Party ticket. Revolutionaries flocked to Indiana to work on this anti-war campaign.

They included a leading Bolshevik, Alexandra Kollontai. She became the first woman to hold the diplomatic rank of minister when appointed Soviet envoy to Norway in 1923. (Kollontai became the USSR's ambassador to Mexico in 1926.)

A million-and-a-half leaflets were passed out in the district. The last socialist parade of the campaign stretched 15 blocks through Terre Haute. It was festooned with red flags from beginning to end.

Although Debs was beaten by the Republican candidate, he got more votes than the incumbent Democratic congressman. ("The Bending Cross, A Biography of Eugene Victor Debs" by Ray Ginger)

This socialist movement was smashed. Indiana was probably more affected than any other big manufacturing state by World War I and the redbaiting campaign which followed. Indianapolis became the national office of the American Legion, which was organized in 1919 to "fight Bolshevism" and break strikes.

The Black Lives Matter movement is breaking through this reaction. Poor and working people in Indiana will be heard.



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