

Free Jay Burton: Fighting for justice against LA's neo-Nazi Sheriff's gangs

written by Scott Scheffer
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On Aug. 29, 1970, some 25,000 people gathered for the Chicano Moratorium in East

Los Angeles to protest the brutal U.S. imperialist war against the Vietnamese people. Early in the historic protest, L.A. County Sheriff's Deputies attacked, beating people and firing tear-gas grenades.

By the time the assault was over, they had murdered four people. Ruben Salazar, a progressive Chicano journalist, was killed after going into the nearby Silver Dollar Café to gather himself. Los Angeles County deputies fired a tear gas canister into the cafe, striking him directly in the head.

In the aftermath, the Coroner's Inquest revealed that an organized, violent gang within the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department were the shock troops in the assault and were responsible for the four deaths. No Sheriffs, Deputy Sheriffs or commanders took responsibility or were punished.

The gang was called the Little Devils. The revelation of their existence was the first exposé of a decades-long series of murders, beatings, raids on people's homes at gunpoint, frameups of innocent people, organized violence and murders of inmates carried out by the fascist, racist County Sheriff's gangs in the department, which continue to this day. A recent study found that there are currently at least 24 named gangs in the L.A. County Sheriff's Department (LASD).

After the Little Devils faded, an even more notorious and avowed white supremacist gang came to be known as the Lynnwood Vikings.



Jay Burton

At a Black History Month forum at the Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice, Aye Jay, a Los Angeles-based attorney and community organizer, spoke about the case of Jay Burton, one of the victims of the Lynnwood Vikings. He said:

“Jay Burton is a political prisoner of today who was ensnared by the neo-Nazi LASD gang known as the Lynnwood Vikings when he was just 16 years old. People need to grapple with what that means for today’s society and the function of ‘law enforcement.’ Think about knowing someone in your own backyard being wrongfully convicted and imprisoned for 36-plus years for a crime they didn’t commit. Doing nothing would be insanely callous, right? That’s why we are organizing around the call to FREE JAY BURTON!”

Police agencies in the U.S. are in place to guard the wealth of the capitalists and protect their monopolist profits from the demands of the working class, particularly to keep communities of color in their place.

The LASD is comprised of 18,000 well-armed cops; it’s slightly larger than the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). Between the LASD and the LAPD, their helicopter fleet is second only to the U.S. Air Force. It’s the largest Sheriff’s

department in the U.S., and L.A. has the largest county jail system with a daily count of 12,987 inmates as of the second quarter of 2022.

Parallel to the already violent and racist role of the police, there is a collection of violent Sheriff's Deputies organized in up to two dozen gangs who operate as a shadow government within LASD. They hunt for Black and Brown victims on the street, openly flash their gang signs, and wear gang tattoos on their legs. Deputies are honored in barroom celebrations after beating or shooting a victim, and their tattoos are enhanced to indicate their new status within the gang. They exclude and threaten Sheriff's Deputies who are African-American or women. But their real targets are youth of color.

[An extensive report by Cerise Castle published by KNOCK LA](#) quotes David Lynn, a private investigator, "If you are Black or Brown and walking down your street, it's fair game." Lynn uncovered through his work that regular activities for the fascist gangs include murder, armed assaults, raids on private homes and torture. County jail inmates are among the most vulnerable targets.

Over the years, investigations by the ACLU, a Civilian Oversight Commission, the aforementioned Coroners' Inquest, an FBI "investigation," and even numerous well-meaning progressive journalists' exposés haven't yielded an eradication of this fascist phenomenon. What is often described in the press as a problem that "plagues" the Sheriff's department is actually just the foremost example of the racist violence that is baked into the carceral system under capitalism.

Officially, the prison guards in L.A.'s sprawling county jail system are also part of the LASD. The gang called the 3000 Boys dominates the force of guards at the downtown Men's Central Jail. The 3000 Boys earn tattoos when beating an inmate results in a hospitalization. The Wayside Whities run the Peter J. Pritchess Detention Center.

One former inmate sued the department after he was beaten by them for fighting with a white inmate. They yelled racial slurs as they beat his legs repeatedly with batons until he heard a bone snap and blood gushed from the wound. His suit is only one of many over Sheriff's gang violence that have been settled by the County. They add up to well over \$100 million over the last 30 years.

The two openly white supremacist groups, the Lynwood Vikings and the Compton Executioners, both get their tattoos supplemented with "998," to indicate that they've shot someone.

The way to root out fascist police gangs, in L.A., Chicago, New York City and across the country, is to abolish the police and the capitalist system they exist to protect.

