

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/cases/rocrast-mack/>

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On August 4, 2010, 24-year-old Rocrast Mack Jr. was beaten to death by guards at Ventress Correctional Facility in Clayton, Alabama.

An investigation by EJI revealed that on the evening of August 4, 2010, 24-year-old Rocrast Mack Jr. was lying in his dorm bed covered with a blanket while prison guards conducted a routine count of the population at Ventress Correctional Facility in Clayton, Alabama.

One of the correctional officers conducting the count, Officer Melissa Brown, approached Mr. Mack and accused him of looking at her inappropriately and began shouting at him. She then pulled out her baton, held it in one hand, and struck Mr. Mack in the face with her other hand. Attempting to escape the physical attack, Mr. Mack retreated behind the bed, but Officer Brown followed him and hit him a second time. Mr. Mack struck back, hitting her in the face, then ran away from her and toward the dorm entrance.

Related Article

Guards at Ventress Prison, in rural southeast Alabama, killed 24-year-old Rocrast Mack.

Another officer approached Mr. Mack and ordered him to get on the ground. Witnesses saw Mr. Mack comply with these orders and quickly get on his knees and place his hands on his head. Soon after, at least five other officers, including Lieutenant Michael Smith, arrived at the scene after responding to a call for back-up.

Even though Mr. Mack was on his knees and subdued, witnesses report that officers violently assaulted Mr. Mack. Officers beat Mr. Mack with batons and fists, striking his head, face, and body. The correctional officer who initially got Mr. Mack to submit to arrest tried to intervene and attempted to pull the officers off of Mr. Mack and put himself between Mr. Mack and the assaulting officers. This officer was threatened by other guards and forced to retreat. Lieutenant Smith was heard to say that the guards were going to kill Mr. Mack. The threat and continuing assault occurred at the entrance of the dorm and was witnessed by dozens of incarcerated people.

Mr. Mack was subsequently beaten by guards in the dorm and in the prison yard until his bloodied body became limp. Even after he appeared to be unconscious, witnesses saw guards continue to hit, kick, and punch Mr. Mack.

The guards ultimately took Mr. Mack, who was unresponsive, to the shift office, slammed Mr. Mack's head into a wall, and closed the door.

Witnesses later saw a golf cart driven by a nurse leave the shift office with Mr. Mack's body on the back of the cart. His arms were dangling, his neck appeared twisted, and his head bobbed uncontrollably. Believing he was dead, incarcerated men began to protest and attempted to make phone calls for help. Prison staff disconnected the phones to prevent phone calls immediately following the incident. Upon arriving at the infirmary, guards were seen throwing Mr. Mack's limp body to the ground while the nurse stood by watching.

Mr. Mack reportedly sustained fractures to his ribs, arms, legs, and skull during the attack. He was taken to Troy Regional Medical Center that evening and then transferred to Jackson Hospital in Montgomery. Reports indicate that Mr. Mack was brain dead by the time he arrived at Jackson Hospital. An autopsy report concluded that Mr. Mack died as a result of multiple blunt force trauma. The coroner ruled that his death was a homicide and his injuries were unusually severe.

On August 8, 2011, EJI [called for](#) the immediate criminal prosecution of Alabama correctional officers who brutally beat a 24-year-old man to death.

In letters sent to [Barbour County District Attorney Ben Reeves](#) and [Attorney General Luther Strange](#), EJI asked the State of Alabama to initiate criminal prosecution against the officers who murdered Rocrast Mack.

A similar letter was sent to the [U.S. Department of Justice](#) asking that federal charges be filed against those responsible for the crime.

In November 2011, the *Huffington Post* published an [investigative report](#) documenting a history of violence by some of the officers involved in Mr. Mack's killing and the inadequate responses by state officials to staff violence against incarcerated people. The report generated [national attention](#) about violence by guards in Alabama prisons.

On October 18, 2011, former correctional lieutenant Michael Anthony Smith was [arrested](#) for the murder of Rocrast Mack.

The Alabama Attorney Generals office presented evidence to a Barbour County grand jury that resulted in an indictment charging that then-Lieutenant Smith murdered Mr. Mack by beating him with his hands, fists, feet, and/or baton.

On June 25, 2013, Michael Smith was [convicted in federal court](#) of fatally beating Rocrast Mack. He was convicted of violating Mr. Macks civil rights, conspiring to cover up what happened, and obstruction of justice.

On November 18, 2011, the Justice Department announced that Scottie T. Glenn, a former correctional officer at Ventress Prison, [pleaded guilty](#) in federal court to civil rights and conspiracy charges arising from the beating death of Rocrast Mack.

The Dothan office of the FBI opened a federal investigation into Mr. Macks murder, which led to Mr. Glenns guilty plea. He admitted in court that he escorted Mr. Mack in handcuffs to an office at the prison, knowing that he would be beaten by correctional officers. After Mr. Mack was beaten to death by prison guards, Glenn and other officers, at the direction of another officer, lied in written reports and lied to investigators to cover up the killing.

Mr. Glenn pleaded guilty to one count of violating Mr. Macks civil rights and one count of conspiring with other corrections officers to cover up the killing. The civil rights charge carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison. The conspiracy charge carries a maximum penalty of 5 years in prison.

In January 2013, former correctional officer Matthew Davidson also [pleaded guilty in federal court](#) to civil rights and conspiracy charges. Mr. Davidson pleaded guilty to two counts of violating Mr. Macks civil rights and to one count of conspiring with other corrections officers to obstruct justice by covering up the incident. The charges carried a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison on the civil rights violations and a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison on the obstruction of justice related violation, but as part of a plea deal, prosecutors agreed not to recommend more than 11 years.

Federal prosecutors also charged former corrections officer Joseph Sanders with felony civil rights violations, obstruction of justice-related violations, and false statements violations. He pleaded guilty on July 8, 2013.

Press Release Calling for Prosecution of Guards Who Killed Rocrast Mack

Letter to Attorney General Eric Holder

Letter to Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange

Letter to Barbour County District Attorney Ben Reeves

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