Facial recognition technology blamed for mistaken arrest in Louisiana purse snatching case

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Facial recognition mistake leads to wrong man being arrested and thrown in jail for SIX days - despite never visiting Louisiana where purse snatch was committed and 40lb weight difference with real criminal

- **Randall Reid, 28, was wrongfully jailed in November after facial recognition technology mistook him for a Louisiana purse theft**

- **Aside from having a mole on his face and a 40-pound weight difference from the suspect, Reid says he has never been to Louisiana**
- **Reid is black and critics warn that facial recognition technology can result in higher misidentification of people of color**

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Louisiana authorities' use of facial recognition technology led to the mistaken arrest of a Georgia man on a fugitive warrant, an attorney said in a case that renews attention to racial disparities in the use of the digital tool.

Randall Reid, 28, was jailed on November 25 in DeKalb County, Georgia, after authorities misidentified him as a purse theft in Jefferson Parish and Baton Rouge.

'They told me I had a warrant out of Jefferson Parish. I said, "What is Jefferson Parish?"' Reid said. 'I have never been to Louisiana a day in my life. Then they told me it was for theft. So not only have I not been to Louisiana, I also don't steal.'

He was released on December 1 when authorities recognized their mistake.

Reid is black, and his arrest brings new attention to the use of a technology critics say results in a higher rate of misidentification of people of color than of white people, The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate reported.

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Critics warn that facial recognition technology can result in higher misidentification of people of color. Pictured: a random man

Tommy Calogero, Reid's attorney, said he was falsely linked to the June theft of luxury purses from a consignment shop in Metairie, a New Orleans suburb in Jefferson Parish.

The thieves had stole $10,000 worth of luxury Chanel and Louis Vuitton purses over a three-day span.

A Baton Rouge Police Department detective then adopted the Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office's identification of Reid to secure an arrest warrant alleging he was among three men involved in another luxury purse theft the same week, court records show, according to the newspaper.

Differences, such as a mole on Reid's face, prompted the Jefferson sheriff to rescind the warrant, said Calogero, who estimated a 40-pound difference between Reid and the purse thief in surveillance footage.

'I think they realized they went out on a limb making an arrest based on a face,' Calogero told NOLA.

The police department use of face recognition in Reid's arrest is unclear.

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Reid's case brings renewed attention to the use of facial recognition tools in Louisiana and elsewhere.

In July, New Orleans City Council voted to allow police to use facial recognition after several people complained about privacy issues, NOLA reported.

Police can use facial recognition to identify suspects of violent crimes after all other tactics failed.

Authorities in New Orleans say facial recognition can be used only to generate leads and that officers must get approval from department officials before lodging a request through the Louisiana State Analytic and Fusion Exchange in Baton Rouge.

Under the latest city rules, all possible matches must undergo a peer review by other facial recognition investigators.

Legislation to restrict the use of facial recognition statewide died in a 2021 legislative session.

HOW DOES FACIAL RECOGNITION TECHNOLOGY WORK?

Facial recognition software works by matching real time images to a previous photograph of a person.

Each face has approximately 80 unique nodal points across the eyes, nose, cheeks and mouth which distinguish one person from another.

A digital video camera measures the distance between various points on the human face, such as the width of the nose, depth of the eye sockets, distance between the eyes and shape of the jawline.

This produces a unique numerical code that can then be linked with a matching code gleaned from a previous photograph.

Facial recognition systems have faced criticism because of their mass surveillance capabilities, which raise privacy concerns, and because some studies have shown that the technology is far more likely to misidentify Black and other people of color than white people, which has resulted in mistaken arrests.

The research comes amid the widespread deployment of facial recognition technology for law enforcement, airports, banking, retailing, and smartphones.

Failures could lead to the 'wrong people being arrested' and 'lengthy interrogations' according to Jay Stanley of the American Civil Liberties Union.

A National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) study conducted in 2019 found two algorithms assigned the wrong gender to black females 35 percent of the time.

Activists and researchers have claimed the potential for errors is too great and that mistakes could result in the jailing of innocent people.

They also claimed that the technology could be used to create databases that may be hacked or inappropriately used.

The NIST study found both 'false positives,' in which an individual is mistakenly identified, and 'false negatives,' where the algorithm fails to accurately match a

face to a specific person in a database.

An expert in facial recognition software from the MIT Media Lab says that this study shows the proliferation of face surveillance should be halted to protect people.