



**CASE STUDY ONE:
REPARATIONS FOR
POLICE TORTURE —
CHICAGO**



TYPE OF REPARATIONS:

- ☒ Apology
- ☒ Financial compensation
- ☒ Services and Support for Survivors
- ☒ Public Education
- ☒ Memorial

MECHANISM:

- ☒ Legislative

TARGET:

- ☒ Mayor of Chicago
- ☒ Chicago City Council

BENEFICIARIES:

Black people tortured by Chicago Police Commander Jon Burge and detectives under his command at Areas 2 and 3 of the Chicago Police Department between 1971 and 1992.

OUTCOMES:

- ☒ Official apology from the City of Chicago to living survivors.
- ☒ Creation of a Public Memorial (currently unfunded).
- ☒ **Public Education:** Chicago Public School curriculum to include a section co-developed with organizers and torture survivors entitled "Reparations Won: A Case Study in Police Torture, Racism, and the Movement for Justice."
- ☒ **Compensation:** \$5.5 million Reparations Fund for Burge Torture Victims divided equally (approximately \$100,000 per survivor) among 57 living survivors with credible claims of torture by Jon Burge and detectives under his command between 1971 and 1992.
- ☒ **Free enrollment in City Colleges** for torture survivors, immediate family, and grandchildren.
- ☒ Priority access to city employment for torture survivors.
- ☒ **Creation of a counseling and organizing center** for survivors and all people affected by police violence in Chicago.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:



- ☒ What lessons from the Chicago reparations struggle might be applied to a fight for reparations in your community?
- ☒ What strategies seem most and least promising in a reparations fight?
- ☒ What does it mean to wage a multiracial struggle for reparations in which white allies play a leadership role? What are potential challenges? How might they be addressed?

NOTES FOR DISCUSSION:



WHAT HAPPENED?

Between 1971 and 1992, Chicago Police Commander Jon Burge and detectives under his command tortured over 120 Black men and women during interrogations. Detectives used electric shock, suffocation, beatings, Russian Roulette, rape, and denial of food, water, and bathrooms to obtain confessions, which were then used to secure criminal convictions and severe sentences, up to and including the death penalty. Torture survivors, their mothers, other family and community members, along with reporters, organizers, and lawyers, led a 30-year struggle. As a result, they won Burge's termination from the Chicago Police Department, an official acknowledgment of a systemic practice of torture, and the exoneration of 21 Burge torture survivors who were subsequently released from death row and prison. Some survivors were able to file successful civil lawsuits for wrongful conviction and obtain financial compensation. However, many survivors could not successfully file lawsuits because the statute of limitations had passed. Additionally, almost 30 remained behind bars based on convictions secured through confessions obtained by torture. Beyond Burge's termination with a full pension, no police officers or county officials responsible for the torture and subsequent cover-up, or for pursuing and upholding prosecutions based on confessions obtained by torture, were held accountable— in fact, one went on to become the Mayor of Chicago, and many others became prosecutors and judges.



In 2005, Standish Kwame Willis, founder of Black People Against Police Torture (BPAPT), called for reparations for survivors of police torture in Chicago before the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights that same year. In 2006, Joey Mogul, a white attorney from the People's Law Office, who has represented and organized on behalf of dozens of torture survivors, secured a finding from the UN Committee Against Torture calling on the United States government to investigate the cases and bring the perpetrators to justice.

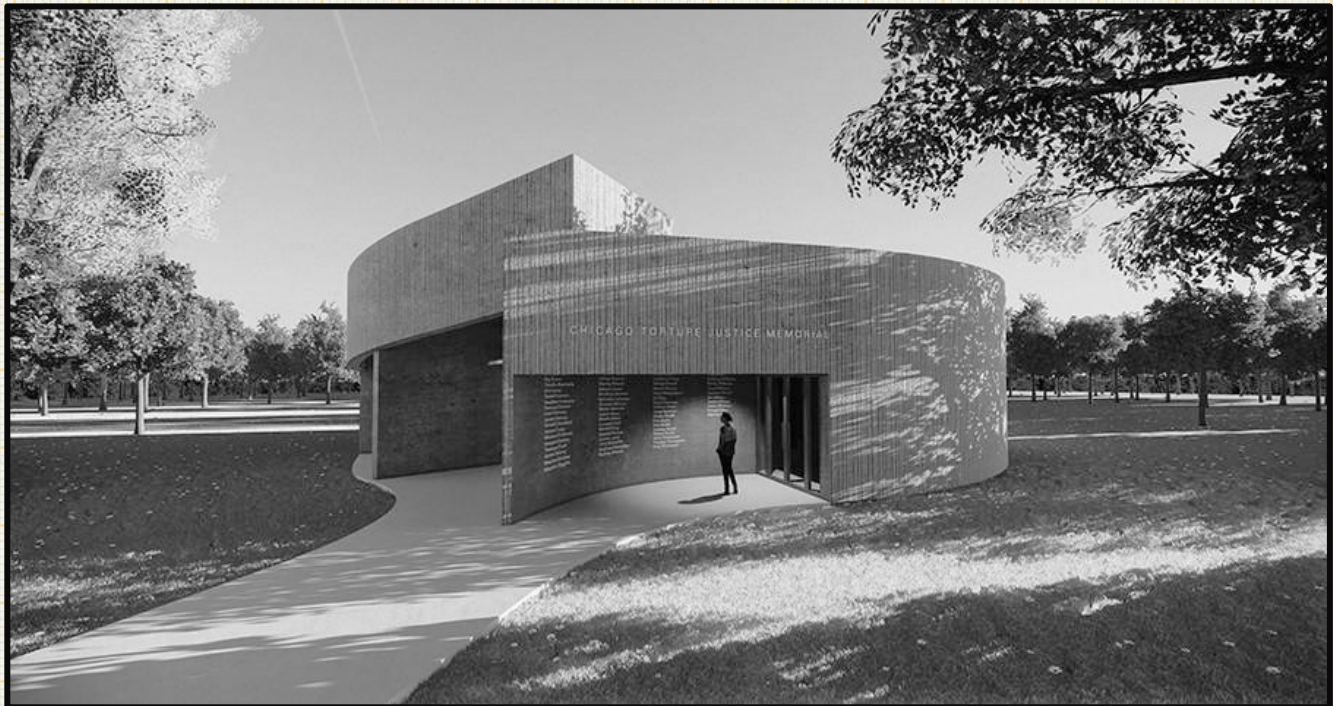
Following widespread media coverage and public pressure, former Chicago Police Commander Jon Burge was prosecuted and convicted for perjury and obstruction of justice for lying about the torture he and other detectives committed (he could no longer be prosecuted for his acts of torture due to the expired statute of limitations).



In 2013, Mogul founded the Chicago Torture Justice Memorials (CTJM) with survivors, artists, organizers, and lawyers to explore what justice for survivors of police torture could look like, and how to publically memorialize the Burge torture cases. CTJM issued a call for proposals and mounted dozens of exhibits and events exploring visions for individual and collective justice and healing for survivors and Black communities on the South Side of Chicago. In September 2013, Mogul drafted and submitted a municipal reparations ordinance as a proposed memorial to the survivors and the struggle for justice.

In the Spring of 2014, a delegation of Black youth from We Charge Genocide, an organization named after the 1951 Civil Rights Congress We Charge Genocide petition, returned from a second successful effort to call for justice in the Burge torture cases before the UN Committee Against Torture.

In 2014, within the context of heightened outrage around police violence, Chicago community organizations came together under the leadership of CTJM, Mariame Kaba and Project Nia, We Charge Genocide, and Amnesty International USA to secure passage of the reparations ordinance. Through weekly protests and actions, including train takeovers, sing-ins, light actions, banner drops, public rallies, art exhibits, and demonstrations at Chicago's City Hall over a six month period leading up to a mayoral and city council election, organizers eventually secured passage of the reparations legislation and creation of a \$5 million compensation fund.



In addition to individual monetary compensation, the reparations legislation included provisions for restitution and repair, including a full official public apology to the survivors by the City of Chicago, construction of a memorial to the survivors and their struggle for justice, inclusion of a section on the torture cases in the Chicago Public Schools 8th and 10th grade curricula, free tuition at the City Colleges for torture survivors, their immediate family members, and grandchildren, priority for city jobs, and creation of a counseling and organizing center on the South Side of Chicago.



CHALLENGES AND LESSONS

LEARNED:

The Chicago reparations package represents a significant victory in a local struggle for reparations. That said, beyond the creation of a counseling and organizing center that is open to anyone affected by police violence in Chicago, it only provides reparations and redress for a limited group of people who experienced particularly egregious forms of police torture and brutality at the hands of a specific group of officers during a particular time frame. Chicago's reparations package did not produce any policy change, and there are no guarantees of non-repetition. While the specific forms of torture deployed by Burge may no longer be used, Chicago police officers continue to kill, torture, rape, and use Tasers, violating the rights of Chicago residents with impunity.

Additionally, there is currently no guaranteed city funding for the Chicago Torture Justice Center beyond 2019, and while the City has identified land upon which the memorial can be built, it has not yet appropriated any funds to do so.

One of the most significant lessons learned in the Chicago campaign for reparations is how hard implementation can be. It is important to think ahead, beyond passage of legislation, and to build a team (including and beyond organizers) who possess the necessary knowledge, skills, experiences, and most importantly, energy and commitment, to help ensure robust and principled implementation of a comprehensive reparations legislation package.

