

Louisiana Voice

Justice Initiative lobs accusatory bombshells at Jeff Davis, Calcasieu SO, Jennings PD in letter to Justice Department



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Chris Lehman retired from both the Navy and from federal civil service before settling in Jennings where he was appointed as an auxiliary police officer for the City of Jennings. He has been crying “wolf” for years but no one in his former department or in city administration would give him the time of day, much less take his concerns seriously.

But now, thanks to a New Orleans attorney you’ve probably never heard of, Lehman’s warnings of rampant corruption in the law enforcement community of his adoptive home, but in the parishes of Jefferson Davis and Calcasieu as well, may finally be gaining some traction.

Perhaps in retrospect, it’s a good thing that Lehman was eventually asked to leave a police department that has since been tainted by almost incomprehensible stories of corruption. To stay may have gotten him unjustly painted with the same broad brush.

Lehman has been aided in his quixotic quest by a bombshell book, *Murder in the Bayou*, by Ethan Brown that linked the slaying of eight Jennings-area women to local law enforcement. Brown’s book on the so-called “Jeff Davis 8” was also the subject of a Showtime documentary

that refocused national attention on Jefferson Davis Parish. (NBC's *Dateline* had earlier done an investigative piece on the abuse of the asset forfeiture laws—particularly in their application to Latino motorists—by the sheriff's department).

But the Jeff Davis 8 aren't the only victims; in all, there are 17 unsolved murders on the books in Jennings between 2005 and 2014, giving the town's police department an abysmal homicide clearance rate south of 7 percent in 2014 (compared to a national rate of 64 percent).

Seventeen unsolved murders in 10 years. Let that sink in.

A July 8 letter by New Orleans attorney Mercedes Montagnes, executive director of The Promise of Justice Initiative, has the potential of blowing the metaphoric lid off the Southwest Louisiana community of about 10,000 people provided, of course, if she can get anyone in William Barr's Justice Department to listen.

That, admittedly, is a mighty big IF.

And lest one become fixated on the Jeff Davis 8 because of the national publicity their murders have received, there are other issues: the aforementioned asset forfeiture enforcement spree in both Jeff Davis and Calcasieu parishes, drugs going missing from evidence rooms (try 300 pounds of marijuana in a single theft), a deputy's purchase of a truck from a suspect during questioning (a truck believed to have been used to transport a murder victim that was never processed for possible evidence), multiple cases of sexual abuse of female prisoners by law enforcement officials and other inmates, human trafficking carried out by deputies, embezzlement, malfeasance, misuse of public funds for personal use, and voyeurism.

But aside from the unsolved murders, possibly the most unfathomable offense – and one of the most common – is not even illegal: the practice of errant cops and deputies being allowed to resign in lieu of being fired only to turn up in a neighboring town or parish in the employ of another law enforcement agency.

It's a form of Recidivism you never hear discussed by politicians, probation officers, sheriffs or chiefs of police even though it is obviously a problem in law enforcement. The only recidivism they're concerned with is not the reemergence of bad cops but the repeat offenders who keep returning to their jails and prisons.

When [DENNIS PERKINS](#), for example, was allowed to resign under a cloud from the City of Walker Police Department, he next turned up as head of the Livingston Parish Sheriff's Department's SWAT team when he and his schoolteacher wife were arrested last October for numerous sex crimes, including rape and child pornography and sexual abuse of an animal. Only then was he fired by Sheriff Jason Ard, ironically, the man who'd originally recommended him for the sheriff's department position when he himself was a deputy.

Montagnes alludes to the problem of bad cops who simply resign only to pop up down the road like some sort of whack-a-mole where they can continue to harass women, steal, sell drugs, or even kill.

But her letter goes much further than that. She cites actual names, dates, and places:

- Frankie Richard, deceased: known drug dealer, human trafficker and a “prime suspect” in the murders of the Jeff Davis 8,” who, along with an unidentified police officer took 300 pounds of weed from the Jennings Police Department's evidence room.
- Jeff Davis deputy and chief criminal investigator for the sheriff's office, who coerced a suspect, Connie Siler, into selling him her truck (which he in turn sold for a profit) while she was being questioned. The truck was believed to have been used to transport the body of a murder victim but the vehicle was never processed for evidence.
- Calcasieu Parish detective Donald “Lucky” DeLouche was said by Montagnes to have provided suspects drugs that had been seized by police. DeLouche was director of Calcasieu Parish's Violent Crimes Task Force during the time when there was a series of violent murders, including at least two in which the sheriff's son was implicated. In 1997, DeLouche was accused of sexually molesting his daughter and his then-girlfriend. He was charged with aggravated rape and aggravated oral sexual battery but never prosecuted. In 2000, he was recruited to the Jennings Police Department. Later, as Jennings Police Chief, DeLouche forced a female employee to videotape herself getting her nipples pierced and then showed the video to office visitors. He resigned from the Jennings Police Department in 2003 and next turned up in a leadership position in the Welsh Police Department.
- Todd D'Albor, a former Jennings police chief, discouraged his officers from investigating certain drug crimes and used public property for personal use while in office. He briefly served as police chief for St. Martinville and is now the New Iberia Police Chief.

- Allarate Frank, a jailer convicted of criminal malfeasance for trafficking women in the Jeff Davis jail, continued to work in a number of nearby local law enforcement agencies and ran unsuccessfully for Eunice police chief.
- Lake Arthur police detective Raymond Mott refused orders from detective supervisor (and later warden) Terrie Guillory to cease conducting drug arrests and was punished for his commitment to his job. Guillory, who participated in the trafficking of women and is a potential suspect in the murders of the Jeff Davis 8, became a detective for the Welsh Police Department.
- Former Jefferson Davis Parish Sheriff Dallas Cormier was charged with 36 federal felonies, including improper use of inmate labor and using \$250,000 in public funds to purchase trucks, boots and guns for personal use. He subsequently served only one year's probation and was ordered to pay a fine of \$10,000 – for diverting 25-times that amount for his personal use. (See pages 139-141 of my book, *Louisiana's Rogue Sheriffs: A Culture of Corruption*.)
- His successor, Sheriff Ricky Edwards, and his deputies instituted a practice of stopping cars on I-10 without probable cause and seizing assets under civil forfeiture laws. They were accused specifically of targeting Latino drivers. Edwards was rewarded with a cushy position with the Louisiana Sheriffs' Association after he left the sheriff's office.
- Jennings Police Chief Johnny Lassiter was accused in 2013 of taking public funds after a state audit revealed that cash and drugs were missing from the police department's evidence room.
- The Calcasieu Parish District Attorney's office accepted gift cards from defendants in lieu of the performance of community service without the knowledge or approval of the sentencing judge.
- Jeff Davis deputy Eric Phillips removed a female inmate from her cell and raped her in a closet, removed a second female from her cell during the night and raped her and attempted to coerce a third female prisoner into engaging in a sexual relationship.
- Deputy Jacquelyn Varner arranged for a male inmate(s) to rape two female prisoners in separate incidents.
- Deputy Ralph Broussard entered a female inmate's cell without warning while she was in bed and simulated sex with her as a female deputy watched.
- Male trustys were allowed to roam the jail without supervision and reportedly harassed female detainees and even paid jailers for sex with detained women. Detained women who agreed to such arrangements were given special privileges.

- Deputies were able to watch sexual encounters which occurred in a visitation room.

You can read the entire 15-page letter to Assistant Attorney General Eric Dreiband **HERE**.

Montagnes, a native of New York whose husband is a civil rights attorney and a Louisiana native, has no illusions about the Trump-Barr justice department and its tough on crime stance. To initiate prosecutions—or even an investigation—would fly in the face of the law and order advocacy that Trump considers so important in an election year. To think that any decision in Washington would not be political—first, last and always—would be naïve at best.

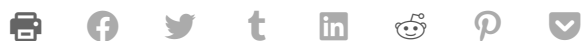
“We do have concerns about (Attorney General William) Barr,” she admitted. “But the Justice Department has responded that they’re looking into our concerns—an acknowledgement that is light years from any commitment to justice.

“Our letter is a call to action and we are encouraging others to contact the Justice Department about the issues we’re concerned with. We would like to see a real groundswell of demands that action be taken against these rogue departments and individuals,” she said.

Whether the Justice Department takes action or not, at least no one should think Lehman is crying wolf anymore.

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