Twitter Thread by Cory Doctorow #BLM

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@doctorow

In 2019, @propublica and @postandcourier ran blockbuster investigations into SC's magistrate judges: inexperienced political appointees with no training who held South Carolinians' lives in their hands - and who use the bench to extract bribes, deal in overt racism and worse.

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The first revealed that SC's magistrates got less training than its barbers, and their appointments, though subject to reapproval, were practically speaking lifelong and irrevocable, regardless of misconduct, bumbling, or actual criminal behavior.

https://t.co/jk4Ne2QQM6

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The qualifications process is bizarre. SC magistrates need to pass a one-hour exam, but they can (and do) re-take it many times without penalty. That test includes questions like "Which of the following numbers is larger?" And magistrates fail that test. Repeatedly.

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Magistrates are so ill-qualified that the rare, decent appointee can end up repeatedly breaking the law without knowing it, as construction worker (and local GOP chairman) Arthur Bryngelson did, leading to him resigning in horror and reporting himself for breaches.

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Not all of the unqualified magistrates have Bryngelson's moral fiber: BBQ chef/magistrate Clemon Stocker got his relative Willie Earl Reese released on bail after he pistol-whipped a man. Reese murdered his wife five days later.

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But the QUALIFIED magistrates are, if anything, even worse. Typical of the lawyers who get appointed to the post is George K Lyall, who pleaded guilty to multiple counts of stealing from his clients.

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Days later, @joey_cranney followed up his piece with a profile of magistrate Mike Pitts, a former GOP state rep, an overt racist pig who called Cory Booker a crackhead, advocated expelling Muslims, and derided trans people.

https://t.co/Af5S8joHha

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Pitts had advocated SC's secession from the USA, argued against removing the Confederate flag after the Emanuel AME Church mass-murder, and worse. His record in the state house was so abysmal that after he lost an election, no one would give him a job.

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No one, that is, except for his crony, state senator Danny Verdin, who got him a job for life dealing out justice in the state's courtrooms.

Verdin isn't exceptionally racist by SC magistrate standards.

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His colleague James Gosnell used racial slurs to refer to defendants. And a former SC magistrate, Peter Lamb, was forced to resign after calling crack "a Black man's disease" (Lamb quit in exchange for not being prosecuted for illegal discrimination from the bench).

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Next, a report on the reaction to the earlier pieces, in which state lawmakers from both sides of the aisle proposed reforms to the magistrate system, with some state senators withdrawing their historic opposition to such a move.

https://t.co/l9ZomkCTOk

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The commonsense, modest reforms are mostly remarkable for what they reveal about the system: judges could no longer be appointed on the say-so of a single senator and judges can't claim "holdover" status to serve indefinitely after their terms are up.

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More: judges would be required to get some modest additional training. Senators would be banned from appointing relatives or former colleagues from the state house, and anyone convicted by a magistrate without a law license would get an automatic appeal before a real judge.

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One more proposal from last year: prospective judges would be legally required to disclose their prior disciplinary offenses - at the time, state senators like Marlon Kimpson vigorously opposed this, because it was a "bureaucratic process."

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None of that came to pass in 2019. Now it's been more than a year, and finally there's some progress on reforming SC's idiotic Klown Kar of a justice system. The legislature is about to reconvene, and magistrate reform is top of their agenda.

https://t.co/yo5SGwbUTO

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GOP state senator Tom Davis is spearheading the effort, with several bills that track the 2019 reform proposal. He'll have an uphill battle, though, with colleagues like state rep Murrell Smith stating "A law degree is not a prerequisite to being a good judge."

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