

Father of two was shot 12 times

Grand jury exonerates Houston cops in murder of Mexican immigrant

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A Texas grand jury has refused to indict five police officers involved in the July murder of Pedro Oregón, a Mexican immigrant and father of two children living in Houston. It indicted a sixth policeman only on a misdemeanor count of trespassing. Oregón was shot 12 times by the officers who burst into his home without a search warrant.

The killing and subsequent whitewash is a tragic illustration of the conditions highlighted in the recent report by Amnesty International detailing human rights abuses in the United States. The report cited widespread abuses by prison guards, immigration officials as well as police officers and departments. 'Police officers have beaten and shot unresisting suspects; they have misused batons, chemical sprays and electro-shock weapons; they have injured or killed people by placing them in dangerous holds.' The report noted: 'While local authorities pay out millions of dollars a year in compensation to victims of violence, wrongdoing is rarely admitted and prosecution of individual officers is rarely successful.'

On July 12 six Houston policemen forced their way into Oregón's apartment after receiving what they claimed was information that drugs were being sold. Oregón, 22, a landscape worker, had gone to bed early that night because he was scheduled to coach a girls soccer game the next morning. The police handcuffed three people they found in Oregón's living room--his brother, his brother-in-law, and a female friend. They then burst into Oregón's bedroom, firing a total of 30 shots. Twelve bullets hit the victim, nine of them in the back.

The police initially claimed Oregón had fired at them. It was later acknowledged that the bullet police alleged

the victim had fired actually came from the gun of one of the police officers.

Despite several searches of the apartment, the police never found any evidence of drug dealing. However John Holmes, the local district attorney, justified the shooting, supporting the police officers' claims that Oregón resisted arrest.

Hispanic workers in Houston, the fourth largest US city, have been outraged by the decision to exonerate the policemen involved in Oregón's murder. The family of the victim has filed a \$35 million civil suit. An attorney for the family called the grand jury decision 'disgusting.'

See also:

US cited for widespread human rights abuses
[17 October 1998]



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