

Detroit police kill deaf mute

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Detroit police officers on Tuesday shot and killed a deaf and mute man whom they say was “menacing” them with a garden rake. Relatives and neighbors who witnessed the shooting of 39-year-old Errol Shaw Sr. said police ignored their shouts that the man could not hear or speak and their pleas not to shoot him. The fatal shooting is the latest for the Detroit Police Department, which leads the US in police killings.

“I was screaming down the street, ‘He’s deaf, he’s deaf, he’s deaf,’” said Katina Crumpton, Mr. Shaw’s 24-year-old niece. She said her uncle was surrounded by four or five police officers who fired at least twice while he was 15 feet away from them. Ms. Crumpton also said that Shaw’s mother, Annie Shaw, screamed at the officers not to shoot her son. Both women’s pleas were cut short by gunfire, she said. “It was a cruel, crying shame what happened here today,” Ms. Crumpton told the *Detroit Free Press*. “This madness has to stop.”

Police said they were summoned to a house on the city’s northwest side Tuesday afternoon by a report that Shaw was armed with a butcher’s knife and chasing his parents, with whom he lived. When police confronted Shaw, they say, he ran to the back of the home to get rid of the knife, and then returned with a metal rake. Police claimed they fired when Shaw swung the rake at them. After the shooting, no knife was found.

A police spokesperson claimed that the officers did not know Shaw was a deaf-mute. Several neighbors, however, confirmed that they heard people screaming at police before the shooting that he couldn’t hear them. When asked about these statements, Deputy Chief Herman Curry said no one had given that information to investigators. His remarks were disputed by Shaw’s niece who said she gave detectives detailed information after witnessing the shooting.

Neighbor Kim Armstrong confirmed this account, telling the *Free Press* that she heard the shouted

warnings while standing outside her home several doors away. “‘He’s mute, he’s deaf, he can’t hear,’ then three shots—pow, pow, pow,” Armstrong recalled for the local newspaper. “It was unnecessary. He didn’t have a gun—he had a rake,” she said.

Witnesses also denounced police for waiting too long to take Mr. Shaw to the hospital, only a few short blocks away. They said police officers did nothing to save the man while he lay bleeding on the side of the house. One neighbor said all they did was shoo flies away from his bloody wound. It is unclear whether police even called an emergency vehicle—because none showed up. Mr. Shaw was finally taken in a squad car to the hospital where he died of gunshot wounds later that evening.

Ms. Crumpton said detectives appeared “nonchalant” as she told them what happened and that other officers stood around laughing and joking.

Neighbors insisted that Mr. Shaw—known as “Errol the yardman” because he did lawn work and odd jobs to earn a living—was not violent. Donald Friday said, “He was no problem. Their reaction was utterly ridiculous. There’s no way in the world that he could have attacked them. I was hurt. Now I’m angry.” Deputy Chief Curry could also give no explanation why police did not use chemical sprays to apprehend Shaw, even though they were equipped with them.

Shaw’s son, Errol Jr., said he was told that his father was with his parents and that Shaw’s mother told a neighbor to call the police. Shaw’s parents said the officers had no reason to shoot their son. The parents have reportedly refused to cooperate with investigators and are going to hire an attorney to sue the department.

Last May, FBI statistics were made public showing that Detroit police officers kill citizens at a higher rate than police in any other big US city. Detroit had a rate of 0.92 fatal shootings per 100,000 residents, far higher than New York and Los Angeles, two cities recently

scandalized by revelations of widespread police killings, frame-ups and brutality.

In recent years there have been several cases in which Detroit police have killed or severely wounded senior citizens, teenagers and mentally ill persons, and then were exonerated by internal police investigators and the prosecutor's office, after claiming they had fired in self-defense. Mayor Dennis Archer, a close ally of the Clinton administration, has repeatedly defended the integrity of the internal police inquiries.



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