Detroit police gun down another mentally ill man

Debra Watson
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A mentally ill Detroit resident, 22-year-old Sharrone Mathews, was shot dead by police early on the morning of December 13. Nearly a dozen officers fired 80 rounds of ammunition at the young man who had retreated into his home after being questioned by police about a car theft. Mathews died in the doorway of his home, suffering from multiple bullet wounds.

According to police reports, backup teams of police were dispatched when Mathews grabbed an automatic pistol from one of two officers talking to him outside his house, and ran inside. Police explained the fusillade by claiming Mathews was firing from the doorway of the house and one of the backup officers was grazed on the leg by a bullet.

Just three months ago 39-year-old Errol Shaw, Sr. was killed by police. Shaw was both deaf and unable to speak. Detroit police officer David Krupinski and three others fired their weapons even though the man's parents and neighbors shouted at the police not to fire because Shaw could not hear them. Police justified the killing by claiming Shaw was menacing them with a garden rake.

Two weeks later Detroit police fatally shot 49-year-old Dwight Turner, an autoworker, who had been shooting at a stray dog that was terrorizing his neighborhood. The police shot Turner while he was putting down his gun.

In five years more people have been killed per capita by police in this Midwestern city of one million than in any other city in the US. FBI statistics show 0.92 fatal police shootings per 100,000 residents, a rate far higher than in New York and Los Angeles, where embattled police departments are already under investigation by the federal government for their corrupt and deadly practices.

Only two days before the latest police shooting the US Justice Department authorized an investigation by the US Attorney's Office and the Justice Department Civil Rights Division into police misconduct in Detroit. Some fatal police shootings will be included as part of the investigation, as well as brutality inflicted by police in precinct lockups.

Some victims have died while being held in Detroit precinct stations before initial hearings. In the past two years two women, 34-year-old Tori Carter and 61-year-old retired librarian Mildred Brazil, died in jail when they were refused medical attention. Lawyers for others who are suing the city for ill treatment said police use lockups as confession machines and sweatboxes.

Currently New York and 13 other police departments are under investigation for civil rights violations. A recently concluded Justice Department investigation of the Los Angeles Police department resulted in a consent decree, which included an ostensibly independent monitor of the police department. However, the ACLU and other organizations have recently asked to join the oversight as part of the settlement, anticipating the Justice Department under a Bush administration will ignore civil rights violations.

In early November the US Civil Rights Commission chair Mary Frances Berry said not much had changed in relation to abusive police and racial profiling since the federal commission wrote its highly critical report “Who is Guarding the Guardians?” 20 years ago during the Reagan administration.

Federal investigations have failed to stop the bloodletting in US cities, and cover-up at the local level continues to be blatant. Democratic Mayor Dennis Archer continues to back Detroit Police Chief Benny Napoleon, despite anger by Detroit residents over the ongoing police killings. Archer has consistently defended both the actions of the police and subsequent

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cover-ups by departmental investigations.

Only days after the latest murder by police, Napoleon rushed to defend Detroit police officer Eugene Brown, who has come under attack for several shootings of Detroit residents. Brown has been involved in nine shootings in his six years on the force, killing three and wounding a fourth in three separate incidents. In a 32-page report Assistant Chief Marvin Winkler exonerated Brown.

In accepting Winkler's report, Napoleon ignored an earlier report by three department investigators, including another deputy chief and two police commanders. That report said none of the shootings by Brown had been justified. Napoleon refused to release either report. Instead, Brown is being considered for promotion to sergeant.

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