

New Orleans police gun down mentally ill man

Joanne Laurier
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A New Orleans man, described by relatives as mentally ill, was gunned down by police on Monday. Anthony Hayes, 38, was killed after allegedly lunging at police with a three-inch blade. Three bystanders videotaped part of Hayes's confrontation with some 18 police officers, three of whom fired nine shots at the man.

Eyewitnesses expressed anger over the fatal use of force given the victim's apparent illness. They said that Hayes was a familiar, but solitary, figure in the neighborhood. Michelle Dawson, a Burger King employee, said that Hayes would spend hours at a table in the restaurant talking to himself without bothering other customers.

Phin Percy, a professional videographer, shot a videotape from a second-story window that shows Hayes slowly backpedaling up the street, keeping his distance from police. He is wielding a small knife in his right hand, as more than a dozen policeman keep pace, their guns aimed at the man.

Monique Champagne, who had arrived from Austin, Texas, to visit her damaged home, also filmed part of the prelude to the shooting. "There were so many cops there I thought, surely, this guy just shot a cop," said Champagne. She described the scene in which bystanders begged Hayes to surrender and police not to shoot.

"At first it was real quiet and slow, then faster and faster as more cops showed up. Then one gun went off and then a whole bunch went off.... I think it was injustice.... That guy shouldn't have died. Just a shame," she said.

Robert Stickney, a shop owner who watched part of the confrontation through his store's picture window, stated, "It's just a shame they had to kill him."

A patron at a nearby bar, Trey Brokaw, told reporters:

"I didn't see anyone near him. It didn't seem like anyone was going to get hurt."

Responding to questions as to why officers, given their overwhelming force, could not have wounded Hayes in the legs (or simply waited for him to drop the knife), New Orleans Police Chief Warren Riley justified the killing. He told *Associated Press* the officers would have betrayed their training if they had aimed to fire a non-lethal shot. He further stated that officers are trained to treat knife attacks as deadly force and are not schooled in disarming suspects with knives using hand-to-hand combat.

"The vast majority of police departments—state, local and federal—are trained to shoot-to-kill...either the head or the chest area," stated Riley.

Hayes's killing is hardly the first brutal episode involving New Orleans police. City police officers were videotaped October 8 fiercely beating a 64-year-old retired teacher, Robert Davis, in the French Quarter of the city. Last week, two officers were fired over the incident and a third suspended for four months.

Both post-Hurricane Katrina cases of police violence in New Orleans would have received scant attention by the media had they not been captured on videotape. In fact, the American Civil Liberties Union of Louisiana revealed that it is investigating at least 10 brutality complaints filed in the past month or so.

According to Rafael Goyeneche of the Metropolitan Crime Commission of Greater New Orleans, the public feels alienated from a police department "whose reputation of corruption lingers and the new problems compound it."

Thirteen officers remain under investigation after being accused of stealing from unprotected businesses during the Katrina crisis. At the Wal-Mart on Tchoupitoulas Street, videos and photographs show

cops stealing merchandise. A separate case being investigated by the state attorney general's office involves as many as 40 officers in the removal of some 200 cars from a Cadillac dealership.

The New Orleans Police Department's reputation of corruption and brutality goes back decades. It was solidified in the 1990s when police were arrested for crimes ranging from shoplifting and bribery to bank robbery, drug dealing, rape and homicide. Two former cops are currently on death row—one for the 1994 murder of a woman who had filed a complaint against him, another for a triple-murder committed during a restaurant holdup in 1995.

The Bush administration's militarist approach to Katrina, as well as the media's portrayal of the storm's victims as looters and rapists, has no doubt further encouraged the police department's most backward and sadistic elements.

While the Wal-Mart and alleged car thefts by police officers are well documented, other incidents that occurred during the first week after Katrina—before the military arrived—have received far less coverage. These involved at least seven separate shootings by New Orleans police officers in which four people were killed and seven injured.

The most controversial of the incidents took place in eastern New Orleans on the Danziger Bridge on September 4. According to an article in the December 18 issue of the *Times-Picayune*, "When the shooting was broadcast over the police radio, a cheer erupted among commanders who were huddled miles away at 'headquarters'—the valet parking apron at Harrah's New Orleans Casino. When asked what the celebration was about, one captain answered, 'We got six of them. None of our guys got hurt.'

"Police said 7th District officers came under fire when they responded to a report of 'officers down' in an area where contractors had been fired upon earlier. After the smoke cleared it turned out that no officers were wounded." Among those killed was an unarmed 40-year-old disabled man, Ronald Madison, shot multiple times in the back.

A mentally ill man, who by all accounts posed no threat, is gunned down in cold blood, and this execution is justified on the basis of the "shoot-to-kill" mandate given to police agencies. Such a state of affairs is indicative of the growing brutalization of American

society and its underlying social polarization.



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