Family denounces Detroit police murder of seven-year-old child

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Family members say an incendiary device the police threw into their home severely burned seven-year-old Aiyana Stanley Jones before she was fatally wounded by a police gunshot during an early Sunday morning raid.

The second grader at Detroit's Trix Elementary School was sleeping on a front room couch with her grandmother when the "flash-bang grenade" came through the window and landed on the sofa, burning her.

On Monday, an attorney for the family said a videotape of the incident revealed that Aiyana had been shot from outside the house before the grenade was tossed inside. Police officials have claimed an officer accidentally discharged his weapon inside the house after a "physical confrontation" with the child's 47-year-old grandmother, Mertilla Jones.

Jones, a retired school worker, has strenuously refuted the allegations that she had a struggle with the cops. Police officials are now saying the police officer may have "simply collided" with her before the gun discharged.

Up to 20 cops from the Special Response Team, a heavily armed unit referred to by a former member as the "Marine Corps of the Detroit Police Department," conducted the assault on the east side Detroit home located on Lillibridge Street. The grenade—known in the US Army as an M84—is intended to be used in enclosed spaces to "distract and temporarily incapacitate enemy personnel" for easier capture or "when the risk of collateral damage during urban warfare or hostage rescue operations" precludes the use of more lethal high explosive ordnance.

Police say they were conducting a "no knock" search for a homicide suspect. However, the suspect, a 34-year-old male who was arrested by police, did not live in Aiyana's apartment but in a separate, upstairs unit in the three-story home.

The unnamed officer involved in the shooting death is a 14-year veteran who has worked on the Special Response Team for about six years, the assistant police chief said.

It has now been revealed that the police raid was being videotaped for a reality crime show on the Arts & Entertainment Network called "The First 48." A plug for the show on the A&E website, says, "For homicide detectives, the clock starts ticking the moment they are called. Their chance of solving a case is cut in half if they don't get a lead in 'The First 48.' Each passing hour gives suspects more time to flee, witnesses more time to forget what they saw, and crucial evidence more time to be lost forever."

In the twisted minds of the media executives, police raids in Detroit's neighborhoods, like military sweeps through Iraqi and Afghan homes, are "entertainment."

An attorney for the Jones family said the police "were excited; they were on TV. They didn't have to throw a grenade through the front window when they knew there were children in there. There was nothing but innocent people in the home where they put this flash grenade."

There is no doubt that the police were also using overwhelming and indiscriminate force after a similar raid last month—about five miles away—resulted in one cop being killed and another four wounded—the highest number of casualties in any one incident in the history of the department.

Sunday's raid took place in a working class neighborhood a few blocks from Chrysler's Jefferson Avenue Assembly Plant, an area where auto workers once lived, that is now dotted with abandoned houses and vacant lots. Before the raid family members and neighbors told police the house was inhabited by several small children and pointed to the toys on the front lawn. Their warnings were ignored.

After the raid police held Aiyana's grandmother, Mertilla Jones, for more than 12 hours before releasing her. At a press conference Sunday evening, Jones said, "I

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never touched none of them. No one gave them any struggle. They blew my granddaughter's brains out. They killed her right before my eyes. I watched the light go out of her eyes."

Aiyana's aunt, Krystal Sanders, a laid-off office worker, was in the home when the assault occurred. On Monday, she told WSWS reporters she was watching TV around 12:58 a.m. when she heard a loud noise. "I never heard them say they were Detroit police. They told everyone to get down and put their face on the floor, so we could not see what they had done.

"They killed Aiyana. Her brains were on the couch and on the porch. They would not let my brother go with her to the hospital. My brother has a picture of her in the morgue, burned.

"At first the police said that my brother shot at them. Then they blamed my mother. My mother was fingerprinted, given a mouth swab and tested for gunpowder residue. My mother and brother were cleared of all charges."

"There were four children in the house at the time. Aiyana was seven and the others were four, three years old and two months old. My cousin Mark told the police before the raid that there were children in the house. No amount of money will ever bring her back."

Since the shooting, Krystal told the WSWS, she has been unable to sleep or eat. Speaking of the media coverage she said, "The news is crooked. The media interviewed my mother. None of her interviews have been on TV. All of the TV stations were here during the vigil last night. I told A&E not to tear us (her family) down. They know this is a high profile case. Some of these people are lying."

Aiyana's 25-year-old father, Charles Jones, is a self-employed construction worker and handyman. Jones said he rushed into the living room after hearing the explosive and gunshot. Police made him lie face down on the ground with his face in shattered glass and blood. Jones said police told him his daughter would be OK.

In an account of the raid, he told the *Detroit News*, "I saw them (police) running with my daughter out of the house. They had my mother on the floor, and they just kept me there for like two hours. I knew it was bad, and they probably had my baby at the hospital, because someone asked me if she had any allergies. Her blood was everywhere and I was trying to stay calm, but nobody would talk to me. None of them even tried to console me.

"If they were watching this place to see if their suspect was here, why didn't they notice all the toys in the yard and all the kids coming and going downstairs?" Jones asked the *News*. "They came into my house with a flash grenade and a bullet. They say my mother resisted them, that she tried to take an officer's gun. My mother had never been in handcuffs in her life. They killed my baby and I want someone to tell the truth."

After the raid the father reported that the police confiscated Aiyana's blanket, which had been burned by the stun grenade. He also said his daughter had been badly burned and the sofa soaked in blood.

The indiscriminate murder of a seven-year-old child is fueling enormous social anger, which is already reaching the breaking point due to the miserable living conditions in Detroit—where the real unemployment rate is 50 percent—and the daily indignities suffered at the hands of indifferent politicians and city officials.

Police officials have sought to dispel community anger and have said a full investigation would be handled by the Michigan State Police, citing "community confidence concerns," i.e., the Detroit police department's utter lack of popular credibility.

For his part, Mayor David Bing has hardly issued a word on the killing of Aiyana Jones. In brief comments during an event on a different subject Monday, the Mayor sought to defend the police saying he would let the investigation into Sunday's events unfold and didn't "want to point fingers at anybody right now." In an effort to justify the actions of the police he blamed the killing on a wave of violent crime. "This is a time, he said, "for the community to come together. We just can't continue the massacre of our citizens."

Bing, a multi-millionaire businessman is overseeing the further impoverishment of the city, including a corporate-backed plan to shut down schools and city services in whole areas of the city deemed too poor to maintain. To carry out these measures—which are deeply unpopular—he is increasingly relying on the brute force of the police.

At a funeral for a police officer killed in a similar raid last month, Bing called for a law and order crackdown in the city. "We collectively will bring this city back and make sure that those few who disrespect the leadership in this city are not going to take this anymore. The madness has to stop," exclaimed Bing.

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