New Orleans police convicted in post-Katrina killing

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A federal jury convicted three New Orleans police officers December 9 for a 2005 killing and cover-up in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

The killing took place as the city's mostly poor black population was abandoned to floodwaters and vilified by the political and media establishment as "looters" and thugs. Residents struggled without humanitarian aid, while police and other security forces—with the blessing of government officials from then-President Bush on down—went on a rampage against survivors.

On September 2, 2005, police shot the victim in the case, 31-year-old Henry Glover, a father of four, without provocation. After other local residents took him to a police compound in search of medical aid, the police left him to die in the car, then later burned his body in the back of the car, and filed false reports to cover up the crime.

After three days of deliberations last week, the jury convicted former New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) officer David Warren of manslaughter for shooting Glover. Officer Greg McRae was convicted for burning Glover's body. A third officer, Lt. Travis McCabe, was convicted of filing false reports and lying to federal investigators.

McRae and Lt. Dwayne Scheuermann were cleared of beating two men who tried to help Glover by transporting him to the police station for medical assistance. A fifth officer, retired Lt. Robert Italiano, was also found not guilty of obstruction of justice, on charges of filing a false report and making false statements to the FBI.

The case is one of nine federal civil rights and murder investigations focused on NOPD actions after Hurricane Katrina. At least 20 current or former officers with the department have been charged so far. In the past several months, three cases have come to trial ahead of the five-year statute of limitations bearing on 2005 crimes.

The circumstances surrounding the Glover case paint a gruesome pict ure of social desperation and police brutality. On September 2, Henry Glover left his fiancée and daughter at their home in Algiers on New Orleans' west bank in search of food, water, and charcoal. Glover and his friend, Bernard Calloway, took an abandoned truck from a Firestone tire outlet to use for evacuation.

The hurricane had utterly devastated the city's infrastructure, forcing residents to take whatever they could find in order to survive. Glover's task brought him to a nearby strip mall, where Warren and other officers were stationed at a makeshift police bureau to protect the businesses there.

Warren, a rookie on the force at the time, was armed with a non-issue assault rifle. He and his partner testified that they saw Glover and Calloway drive up to the strip mall, exit their vehicle, and run towards an unlocked mall gate. Warren also claimed to have seen a "perceived weapon" on the victim's person. He fired and Glover suffered a fatal wound through his chest. Warren wrote no report on the shooting.

Calloway testified that the two had not been running at all. Instead, he said, just before the "pop" of Warren's gunshot, Glover had been leaning against the truck, lighting a cigarette. After being shot, Glover ran from the mall lot, collapsing in the street some 100 yards away, bleeding profusely.

Glover's brother, Edward King, arrived to help him and flagged down another resident, William Tanner, who agreed to drive the wounded man for medical care. Determining that it would take too long to transport Glover to West Jefferson Medical Center, Tanner and

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Calloway instead drove to a nearby elementary school, which NOPD had made its provisional base of operations.

Instead of helping Glover, however, police accused Calloway and Tanner of being "looters," handcuffed and beat them. Tanner testified that officers kicked him in the ribs and pistol-whipped him repeatedly. Left in the back of Tanner's car, Glover succumbed to his wounds.

Afterward, Officer McRae drove Tanner's car to a batture on the Mississippi River levee, where he set it and Glover's body ablaze with a flare. After stepping away from the burning vehicle, he shot out the back window to "get air into the car." A fellow officer testified that McRae ran down the levee, laughing.

Superior officers said they were aware of his actions, but made no attempts to follow up with an investigation into the matter. Lieutenants McCabe and Italiano falsified a report filed fully three months after the events, identifying the shooting as a "miscellaneous incident." For years, police ignored Tanner's inquiries on the whereabouts of his car. It remained on the levee until March 2009.

Glover's autopsy was equally dubious. Orleans Parish coroner Frank Minyard, using biohazard bags filled with charred flesh and bone, confirmed the identity of the victim, although most of his charred remains, including his skull, were left at the site of the crime and the cause of death was ruled merely "unclassified." The autopsy report allowed for the police department to effectively bury the crime.

No further inquiries were undertaken, despite persistent pleas from Glover's relatives, until an independent investigation by journalist A.C. Thompson at ProPublica was published in *The Nation* magazine in 2008. Federal investigators initiated an investigation into the case shortly thereafter.

The convictions in the Glover case come a little more than a week after another NOPD officer was sentenced to eight years in federal prison for his role in the September 4, 2005 killing of unarmed residents on the Danziger Bridge.

The bridge, which spans East New Orleans' Industrial Canal, was the scene of major police violence against Katrina survivors. A squad of police opened fire on a large group of residents as they crossed the bridge in search of food and dry ground. A 17-year-old, James Brissette, was killed, along with Ronald Madison, a severely mentally disabled 40-year-old man. Four other people were wounded. Lance Madison, Ronald's brother, was arrested and held on fabricated charges of attempted murder of police officers.

The convicted officer, Michael Hunter, is one of five former police who have pleaded guilty. Six other police are also charged in the shooting and cover-up. Hunter testified that he knew their victims were unarmed and posed no threat, but insisted that he did not hit anyone.

Two other NOPD officers were indicted earlier this fall for lying under oath about the shooting death of Danny Brumfield, Sr. outside the city's convention center on September 3, 2005. Police shot Brumfield in the back as he, along with thousands of other stranded survivors, pleaded with officials for emergency assistance. The two officers, Ronald Mitchell and Ray Jones, have not been charged with the shooting itself.

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