

# Fullerton, California authorities attempt to cover up police murder of innocent homeless man

Tom Carter  
25 August 2011

The official and now fully-discredited whitewash by city authorities of a brutal police killing in Fullerton, California gives some indication of the depth of the social crisis in the United States.

On July 5, 2011, six police officers in Fullerton savagely beat to death Kelly Thomas, a slim 34-year-old man whom acquaintances described as a “passive and gentle person.” This event has generated angry public protests in Fullerton in addition to widespread shock and revulsion internationally.

In the immediate aftermath of the killing, the six officers involved were permitted to watch a video of the beating before preparing their official reports. Nothing could more clearly expose the open collaboration of city officials with the police department to cover up the killing and protect the officers involved.

Police officers in the US are traditionally not permitted to view videotapes before preparing their reports in situations where lethal force was used; this prevents the officers from concocting a story that “conforms” to the evidence.

At the same time, the city contemptuously refused a request from the *Los Angeles Times* for a copy of the video, and even refused to publicly name the officers involved on the grounds that the officers’ “safety” would be jeopardized.

City authorities subsequently announced that an internal investigation would take place, but immediately after he was appointed, the chief investigator announced that he would put his investigation on hold until after the completion of state and federal investigations—in other words, indefinitely.

As many as 200 angry residents packed an August 2

meeting of the Fullerton City Council. Because the city council was packed beyond capacity, still more residents who could not gain entrance watched via closed-circuit television from outside the hall.

For three hours statements were read denouncing the council for permitting the police department to cover up the crime and calling for the resignation of the council members and the police chief. The City Council eventually had to close the public comment section after hearing statements from less than half of those who wished to speak. At one point during the meeting, the exchange grew so heated that three city council members literally fled the hall.

Once a quiet community southeast of Los Angeles that has been devastated by budget cuts, rising unemployment, and home foreclosures, Fullerton has been continually wracked by protests over the past month. Banners and posters at the protests give a sense of the public outrage: “Murderers go to jail, but murderers with badges get paid vacation,” and “Who do you call when cops murder?”

The official story of the July 5 events recounted by the police is that the six officers were responding to reports of attempted car burglaries in the area. The police have always acknowledged that they never had any direct evidence that Thomas was responsible; in fact, evidence over the past week has emerged that suggests that the likely had the wrong man. The officers claim that they approached Thomas and that at some point afterwards Thomas “struggled” with them.

The more details emerge, the more patently false the official story becomes. Thomas could scarcely have presented a threat: he was unarmed, of medium height, and malnourished. Yet the six well-equipped officers

attacked him simultaneously and used their Tasers on him repetitively. According to one eyewitness account, many of the officers wielded their heavy flashlights like clubs, repeatedly striking Thomas' skull long after he had stopped moving.

On Monday of this week, another video surfaced that further explodes the official story. Taken from a cellphone in broad daylight, this video clearly proves that Thomas never attacked the officers. The video then shows six officers standing over Thomas, hitting him with their flashlights, and firing their Tasers at his limp, prone form. Thomas is heard pitifully crying out for his father over the noise of the Tasers.

Like tens of thousands of other hopelessly destitute people who sleep on the streets in the Los Angeles area, Thomas had a history of mental illness but was unable to afford the necessary medication. His parents and acquaintances described his actions as occasionally incomprehensible, but never threatening or violent.

When Thomas arrived at the hospital unconscious, doctors encountered catastrophic injuries to his face, neck and back.

In an interview with the *Orange County Register*, Thomas' father, who raced to the hospital that night, described a scene of horror. "When I first walked into the hospital, I looked at what his mother described as my son ... I didn't recognize him. ...This is cold-blooded, aggravated murder." A gruesome photograph, which was taken by Thomas' father on the night of July 5, has featured prominently in the protests over the killing.

Thomas never regained consciousness; after five days and with no hope for recovery, his family took him off life support.

According to a report released earlier this year by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, more than 50,000 people in Los Angeles are homeless. Abandoned and neglected by society as a result of decades of budget cuts to vital programs, more than a third are mentally ill, and nearly a fourth suffer from a serious physical disability.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit: