

# Unarmed Iowa teenager fatally shot by police

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An unarmed 19-year-old man was fatally shot last Monday by police on the campus of Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. Tyler Comstock, from Boone, Iowa was shot dead by police Officer Adam McPherson at the end of a high-speed chase that ended on campus grounds.

His father, James Comstock, who had reported that his son stole his company truck after they had an argument, called the police on Tyler. The truck belonged to a local lawn care company where the father and son worked.

James Comstock expressed outrage that the police shot and killed his son over a stolen truck. “He took off with my truck. I call the police, and they kill him,” he told the *Des Moines Register* on Tuesday. “It was over a damn pack of cigarettes. I wouldn’t buy him none. And I lose my son for that.”

According to a dashcam video, police Officer McPherson began pursuit of Tyler Comstock as soon as his vehicle was identified. The teenager immediately sped up and drove the truck off at a very high speed. At one point, Tyler stopped his truck, backed into the squad car, as a trailer came flying off the truck, and took off again.

Comstock ran through stop signs, raced through a red light, and wove through narrow city streets at speeds approaching 70 mph. The high-speed chase ended up in the heart of the Iowa State University campus and the truck veered off the road into a grassy area where two squad cars rammed into his truck.

The truck was temporarily stopped, but Comstock restarted the engine. At this point, Officer McPherson got out of his car and fired seven shots at the truck. Comstock died from two gunshot wounds, according to the Iowa state medical examiner’s office.

Twice during the high-speed chase, an unidentified police dispatcher suggested that McPherson stop his pursuit.

“If he’s that reckless coming into the college area, why don’t you back off?” the dispatcher said to McPherson. A few minutes later, the dispatcher again suggested McPherson cut off the pursuit: “We know the suspect. We can probably back it off.”

The Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation cleared McPherson, an eight-year veteran of the police force, of wrongdoing last Thursday. He remains on paid administrative leave.

Story County Attorney Stephen Holmes wrote in a letter to Ames Police Chief Charles Cychosz: “Officer McPherson acted reasonably under very difficult circumstances and McPherson’s use of deadly force was justified.”

Family and friends have responded with bewilderment, shock and anger.

Blake Jensen, Comstock’s cousin, told CBS News: “He [McPherson] has to live with that for the rest of his life of guilt of killing another person’s family member, which we truly loved.”

“He had no right to kill him or shoot him. If he would have just listened to the dispatcher we would still have him (alive),” said LaShawn Jensen, another one of Comstock’s cousins.

Tyler’s mother, Shari Comstock, told *Iowa State Daily*, “Why the hell would they chase him into campus with all the people? Tyler would never hurt anybody, ever. He was just a scared child. He’s pretty rational when he calms down.”

Shari described her son as someone who was tech-savvy, with a knack for tinkering and playing around with computers and cars. She noted that Tyler suffered from emotional issues and was once charged with possession of drug paraphernalia. She also noted, however, that these issues did not detract from her son’s warm and honest demeanor.

While Comstock had a few convictions for minor drug and driving offenses, the Associated Press also



reported that Comstock was not armed during the shooting and had been trying to get his life back on track.

He had been living in a homeless shelter in addition to working with his father. In the report the director of the shelter says: “I seen him the night before. The night before he was calm. We’d all seen him, you know, just before he left we had all seen him and knowing he was just going to work with his dad. You know you don’t expect something like that.”

Notably, a copy of the Ames police department’s chase policy, obtained by the *Des Moines Register*, requires ending pursuit “when the suspect’s identity has been established to the point that later apprehension can be accomplished.”

The document also notes that: the pursuit of a suspect in a chase be ended if the officers or supervisors believe the danger created by a pursuit outweighs the capture of the suspect; and the pursuit be ended when the suspect’s identity is confirmed and the suspect could be apprehended at a later time.

And yet the police officer chose to chase and kill an unarmed teenager in complete violation of official department policies. The investigation by the police department and the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation have only added an official stamp to an execution-style shooting of a suspect for a minor offense.

The brutal actions of the police officer are not an aberration, but reflect increasing incidents of police brutality occurring across the nation with increasing frequency. And the results of the investigation reveal only the decayed state of American law and the contempt for basic democratic rights among all layers of the capitalist state—itsself a product of eroding class relations and growing social inequality.



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