

Video shows police gunning down unarmed man in Long Beach, California

Our correspondent
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A cellphone video shows police in Long Beach, California opening fire at an unarmed man who is fleeing down a flight of stairs.

On the April 27 video, 36-year-old Jason Conoscenti is seen fleeing from a police dog down a long flight of stairs before collapsing at the foot of the stairs in a hail of gunfire. His hands are visibly empty as he runs, and he is clearly not a threat to anyone at the time the police open fire. After being shot repeatedly, he can be seen writhing in pain and reaching his hands towards the sky. Onlookers gasp in surprise and then in horror.

This disturbing video serves as a reminder of the daily reality of police violence in the US. On average, between one and two people in America are killed by the police every day.

Fifteen minutes earlier, Conoscenti had allegedly brandished a pair of scissors at a department store. After leading police on a 15 minute chase, he fled on foot down stairs leading to the beach. The cellphone video appears to have been taken from an apartment complex that overlooked the scene.

After the shooting, one of the onlookers can be heard repeating, “Are you kidding me?” Around a minute and a half passes before anyone approaches Conoscenti’s body after the shooting, to the dismay of the onlookers. Then police officers can be seen approaching, and instead of providing first aid, they roughly handcuff Conoscenti.

An official police statement regarding the incident read, “The suspect failed to surrender and after officers observed him reaching for his waist band, an officer-involved shooting occurred.”

The video clearly refutes the official story, as Conoscenti’s hands are nowhere near his waistband and are clearly empty at the time of the shots. “Reaching for the waistband” is a standard trope in

American police newspeak, invoked mechanically whenever the police shoot someone who was unarmed.

One 2011 study reported by the *Los Angeles Times* found that almost half of “waistband” shootings involving Los Angeles county sheriff’s deputies involved unarmed people. The “reaching for the waistband” story takes advantage of the fact that the police themselves are usually the only surviving witnesses to such shootings. In the rare cases where a video surfaces, a glimpse is offered of the ugly reality.

After the “reaching for the waistband” story was exposed as false in relation to Conoscenti, officials replaced it with an equally dubious story: that a police officer fired a “non-lethal” bean bag at Conoscenti, which other officers misunderstood as live fire.

The population is seething with anger over the epidemic of police violence, which shows no signs of abating. This phenomenon is reflected in the common practice of filming the police with cellphones whenever they are encountered. In Los Angeles, as in every major metropolitan area, the number of incidents of police brutality caught on video is steadily mounting.

In August 2012, Los Angeles police officers were caught on video savagely beating a college student who was allegedly skateboarding on the wrong side of the street, breaking several bones in his face. A video uploaded in January 2012 shows police shooting and killing 22-year old East Los Angeles Community College student Steve Rodriguez, who is carrying a pipe bender tool.

Another video in September 2012 showed LAPD officers body slamming a young nurse face first onto concrete pavement. After body slamming her a second time, the officers celebrate with a fist bump. A December 2013 video, which was inadvertently broadcast on live TV, shows Los Angeles police

executing Brian Newt Beaird, an unarmed mentally ill man, while he was walking away from them after he crashed his car.

This is by no means an exhaustive list. Similar videos can be found in every area of the country.

Emboldened by the expanding police state measures being implemented by the Bush and Obama administrations, and awash in federal funding and military hardware, police throughout the country are increasingly prone to unleash lethal violence at the slightest provocation.

Police departments are being deliberately built up and militarized, and callous violence is being encouraged in order to menace the population and undermine democratic rights. The police respond to every major protest with a massive show of force, complete with snipers on the rooftops. Battalions of uniformed thugs are poised to be unleashed against any social opposition that might emerge to social inequality and the political setup.

The Long Beach Police Department was already under scrutiny for a spike in shootings of unarmed people. In one well-known 2010 case, Long Beach police officers shot and killed Douglas Zerby without warning because he was carrying a garden hose nozzle that the officers claimed to have been mistaken for a gun.

Long Beach authorities have promised an “investigation” into the shooting of Conoscenti, urging the public to wait for its conclusion. These official police “investigations” often consist of browbeating witnesses and rearranging evidence, followed by a public announcement months or years later that the officers’ conduct was “within policy.”



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