

More New York police violence captured on video

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In the week following the brutal killing of Eric Garner, two additional videos have surfaced demonstrating the systemic nature of police violence in America's largest and most unequal city.

Garner died July 17 in Staten Island following an assault by New York City police officers. Video footage captured police officers, who for years had harassed Garner for allegedly selling untaxed cigarettes, placing Garner in a chokehold, ignoring cries that he couldn't breathe, then failing to make any effort to resuscitate him after he collapsed.

Just six days after Garner's killing, eyewitnesses used cell phone cameras to record another violent assault by the NYPD, this time in Bedford-Stuyvesant, a largely African American working class neighborhood in Brooklyn. The footage, posted to YouTube, shows the officers wrestle 32-year-old Jahmil El Cuffee to the pavement, head first. Once on the ground, one officer grabbed Cuffee by the throat while the other pulled his gun. Cuffee can be heard pleading "help me" as police violently twist his arms and legs and jam their forearms into his neck. The gun-wielding NYPD officer, identified as Joel Edouard, briefly left the scene only to return to stomp the subdued man's head against the concrete.

Cuffee's alleged crime was rolling a marijuana cigarette on his own property. For this he was beaten by police, suffering injuries to his head and neck that required treatment at a local hospital. As usual, the victim of police brutality was subsequently charged with resisting arrest and disorderly conduct.

Another video of police brutality, taken three days before Garner's death, shows officers using the supposedly banned chokehold at an East Harlem subway station. Video shot by witnesses captures police officers forcefully kneeling, punching and

choking 22 year-old Ronald Johns, leaving behind a pool of blood on the station floor. Johns is accused of evading the \$2.50 subway fare. After the police beating, a charge of resisting arrest was added to his booking sheet.

In each of these instances, officers captured on film brutalizing their victims have been temporarily reassigned pending investigations.

The rampant abuse by the New York Police Department, laid bare before the world in these videos, is only the tiniest fraction of what is a daily experience of harassment, intimidation and violence unleashed on the city's working class, particularly minority youth.

Eric Garner's widow, Esaw, commenting on the unrelenting nature of the abuse, remarked on a broadcast of Al Sharpton's radio program, "I begged him every single day, every day, I said, 'Babe, please don't let them cops kill you.' Every single day. Last text I got from him was 'I'm good,' and that was a half an hour before they took his life." She continued, "They harassed him. When we went to the supermarket, they harassed him."

In the face of growing popular outrage sparked by Garner's death, the political establishment in New York as well as Washington is mobilizing to contain the crisis.

For mayor Bill de Blasio, the pretense that his administration signifies a fundamental shift from the police abuses notoriously associated with the "stop and frisk" tactics of his predecessors is being exposed as a complete fraud. De Blasio's appointment and strong support of Police Commissioner Bill Bratton, who pioneered the "broken windows" theory of policing and initiated "stop and frisk" under former mayor and law and order demagogue Rudy Giuliani, underscores the essential continuity.

De Blasio has, however, brought a change in public relations strategy to the mayor's office. Shortly after Garner's death, members of his administration reached out to family members, quickly announced an investigation into the incident, and even attended the funeral on Wednesday. Commissioner Bratton announced retraining for the police force on chokeholds, which have been illegal for the past 20 years. He is also sending six officers to Los Angeles for additional training.

Both de Blasio and Bratton placed calls to the Reverend Al Sharpton following Garner's killing, according to a report in the *New York Times*. Sharpton has made a career of using the megaphone provided by the mainstream media to contain the response within the safe orbit of the Democratic Party.

Sharpton, who hosted both de Blasio and US Attorney General Eric Holder at the annual meeting of his National Action Network this past spring, is calling on the Federal Justice Department to open an investigation. Holder said Friday that his department is monitoring the case and has been in contact with the Garner family.

There is growing concern within some sections of the ruling elite that such threadbare moves to contain the crisis are wearing ever thinner. The *New York Times*, in an editorial last week, recommended a tactical shift. "The mayor and commissioner should also begin a serious discussion of the future of 'broken windows' policing, the strategy of relentlessly attacking petty offenses to nurture a sense of safety and order in high-crime neighborhoods...The tactic was embraced in the crime-plagued New York of 20 years ago. But while violence has ebbed, siege-based tactics have not," the Editorial Board wrote. "The city should be making a turn."

In other words, while the brutalization of the working class has its place, the overwhelming hostility and anger risks triggering a social explosion. At present, they argue, that risk can best be managed by temporarily easing up on some of the most aggressive police tactics.

However the social content behind "broken windows" and the unrelenting flood of police violence cannot be resolved through clever shifts in tactics. New York City is a concentrated expression of the enormous and growing social inequality that is the defining

feature of American capitalism. The preservation of the tremendous wealth on Wall Street and Park Avenue alongside attacks on the living standards of workers throughout the boroughs inevitably requires police repression.



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