

As political crisis erupts over police killing

New York police arrest man who taped Eric Garner's death

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New York City police arrested Ramsey Orta, the 22-year old who caught the chokehold death of Eric Garner on video, on weapons charges a week ago.

Orta recorded the killing of Eric Garner and the last few moments of his life on video on July 17, on a Staten Island street corner. The video went viral almost immediately after it was published on the *Daily News* website the next day. It sparked the publication of several others like it, showing police beatings and harassment in several episodes over the last few weeks.

Orta was arrested on weapons charges in Staten Island on August 2 for allegedly handing a handgun to a teenage girl. He was held, released to a hospital, and is now free on bail. His wife was also arrested in a separate incident.

He told the media that he believes that the police had set him up. "When [the police] searched me, they didn't find nothing on me. And the same cop that searched me, he told me clearly himself, that karma's a bitch, what goes around comes around ... I had nothing to do with this. I would be stupid to walk around with a gun after me being in the spotlight."

Whatever the truth of the charges facing Orta, given the long history of NYPD spying and entrapment operations it is entirely possible that Orta was followed and targeted by the NYPD for filming them as they killed a defenseless man. Emily Mercado, Orta's mother, told the media that she suspected a set-up. "They've been following him," she said. "They've been sitting in front of my house. They put spotlights in my window."

The Garner killing has thrown New York City's political establishment into crisis. It has become the focus for the social anger that millions of people in

New York City feel in the face of ongoing police violence and harassment, worsening living conditions, and intractable social inequality.

On July 31, Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio held a roundtable meeting at City Hall that included both William Bratton, the Police Commissioner, and the Democratic Party demagogue Al Sharpton, who has sought to channel the anger of working people, particularly African Americans, into protests that orient themselves to a wing of the Democratic Party.

Sharpton demanded that charges be brought against the NYPD officers who put Eric Garner into the chokehold that led to his death, a sentiment shared by millions of New Yorkers. He referred to the backing that he had given de Blasio during his campaign last year, and said that de Blasio's son, who is mixed race, could be a "candidate for a chokehold."

Bratton issued dismissive remarks about Sharpton after the roundtable, and de Blasio later called Bratton "the finest police leader in the United States of America, period."

The roundtable was clearly disturbing to many in New York's ruling circles and to the police apparatus itself. These elements are concerned that the Garner case could have repercussions the authorities would be unable to control, particularly since the city's Medical Examiner has ruled Garner's death a homicide.

Following the roundtable, the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association (PBA) threatened a police slowdown. In a radio interview, former Mayor Rudolph Giuliani said that de Blasio made a "big mistake ... setting up a press conference like that and putting a police commissioner in that situation. That's extremely damaging to the police commissioner, to keep up the

morale of the police.”

Rupert Murdoch’s *New York Post*, meanwhile, has kept up a constant howl about “anti-police rhetoric” in the media.

The president of PBA, Patrick Lynch, addressing himself alternately to the de Blasio administration, the cops themselves, and the public, told the media, “It was not a chokehold. It’s happening every day in the environment [in which] we’re living, that folks will say, ‘I’m not going.’ That person needs to be placed under arrest. You need to comply with the orders of police officers. Resisting arrest is a real and dangerous crime.”

Lynch then said, referring to the hatred of millions for the NYPD, “the emotion of the street is what is happening.” He accused Sharpton of “stirring up the street,” and added, “If it becomes dangerous for police officers, what chance does the public have?”

Ed Mullens, President of the Sergeants’ Benevolent Association, was particularly incensed that Sharpton had called for a federal investigation into Garner’s death. Mullens, referring to the charge that the police leveled against Garner before they killed him, added, “Selling loosies [unpackaged cigarettes], there are people who suffer. Businesses suffer.” And then, reflecting the real priorities of the ruling class and its political representatives as the social anger of the working class continues to grow, he said “At the end of the day, each and every member of the NYPD has to go home safe. That’s the bottom line. The attacks on the NYPD have to stop.”

It was left to de Blasio, however, to make the most politically significant statement in defense of the state’s repressive apparatus so far. When he stopped at a community center at the impoverished Ingersoll Houses, a public housing development in Brooklyn, on Friday, August 8, he told the media, “That [Garner’s death] was a real tragedy, and it grabbed at all of us, it grabbed at our hearts, but it’s something that has to be a part of the past, meaning we have to move past tensions and unity.”

This reactionary platitude echoes that of another leading Democratic Party politician, Barack Obama, who told the world earlier this month—after admitting, “We tortured some folks”—“We did some things we wished we hadn’t under duress. We’re not going to do that again. I think we could put this behind us.”

In both Obama’s and de Blasio’s utterances, the insistence that working people put the crimes of the police and security apparatus behind them amounts to a license for both the NYPD and the CIA to kill, maim, and torture in the future.

In another recent development, Sharpton has backed off from his plan to lead a march protesting Garner’s death over the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge that connects Brooklyn and Staten Island. The planned march was criticized by police officials and local Staten Island politicians, who claimed that it would block traffic. At de Blasio’s request, Sharpton has now agreed to organize a motorcade across the bridge, with a rally on Staten Island on August 23.



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