

Los Angeles police shoot and kill unarmed man

John Andrews
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Shortly after 8 p.m. Monday evening, two Los Angeles Police Department officers killed 24-year-old Ezell Ford, who was mentally challenged, unarmed, and apparently engaged in no criminal conduct. The shooting occurred only blocks away from his south-central Los Angeles home.

The LAPD announced its latest homicide—reported to be the sixteenth by law enforcement in Los Angeles County so this year—in a cryptic and cynical press release, stating only that officers “conducted an investigative stop”—no further explanation—that “a struggle ensued, which resulted in an officer-involved shooting,” and that “no officers were injured.”

The LAPD press release added, gratuitously, “It is unknown if the suspect has any gang affiliations.”

Details emerged only after family members contacted KTLA, a local television network. According to the victim’s cousin, who witnessed the shooting, “They laid him out and for whatever reason, they shot him in the back, knowing mentally, he has complications. Every officer in this area. .. knows that—that this child has mental problems.”

“The excessive force, there was no purpose for it. The multiple shootings in the back while he’s laying down? No. Then when the mom comes, they don’t try to console her ... they pull the billy clubs out,” Ezell Ford’s cousin said.

“I got pushed on the ground when I tried to find out what happened to my son,” Tritobia Ford told KTLA in an interview Tuesday evening. “My heart is so heavy, my son was a good kid. He didn’t deserve to die the way he did,” she added, complaining that the police did not inform her of her son’s condition or the hospital to which he had been taken for treatment of the bullet wounds.

Leroy Hill, a neighbor, told *Huffington Post* that

Ezell Ford “wasn’t a gang banger at all,” and that while police had him on the ground an officer yelled, “Shoot him.”

Hill described what can only be termed a police execution: “I was sitting across the street when it happened. So as he was walking down the street, the police approached him, whatever was said I couldn’t hear it, but the cops jumped out of the car and rushed him over here into this corner. They had him in the corner and were beating him, busted him up, for what reason I don’t know he didn’t do nothing. The next thing I know I hear a ‘pow!’ while he’s on the ground. They got the knee on him. And then I hear another ‘pow!’ No hesitation. And then I hear another ‘pow!’ Three times.”

Wednesday, LAPD Commander Andy Smith gave the media a patently absurd account of the shooting, rolling out the same canned “going-for-the-officer’s-gun” cliché used by the Ferguson, Missouri, police department to defend last Saturday’s shooting of 18-year-old Michael Brown.

According to the LAPD spokesman, when two gang unit officers got out of their car—still not explaining why they stopped Ezell Ford—he supposedly “spun around, tucked his head toward the officer’s gun and basically tackled him to the ground, trying to grab at the weapon.”

“Ultimately, Mr. Ford was shot by the police officer’s partner and by the officer who was trying to maintain control of his gun,” LAPD Commander Smith said. The same officer “trying to maintain control of his gun,” was somehow able to draw his “backup weapon”—generally a smaller handgun strapped to the ankle—to shoot the suspect,” all while this officer was supposedly lying on his back.

Police receive extensive training on maintaining

“positions of advantage” during field contacts, using words to defuse situations and obtain compliance from safe distances.

It strains credulity to think that a young man engaged in no criminal conduct, even if mentally challenged, would suddenly tackle one of two heavily armed police officers for no reason. Even were Ezell Ford to have done so, however, the officers had sufficient training on weapon retention and control techniques to have resolved the altercation without resorting to deadly force.

In any event, after filling him full of lead, the officers handcuffed Ezell Ford, who was taken by paramedics to a hospital, where he underwent emergency surgery before dying.

Ford is the sixteenth person shot by LAPD officers so far this year. The seventeenth LAPD shooting occurred the next night, nearby in South-Central Los Angeles. A man yet to be identified was injured and taken to the hospital, but is expected to recover. No further details have been released as of this writing.

Not all LAPD homicides are the results of shootings. The LAPD announced, more than a week after the event, that 37-year-old Omar Abrego was pulled over by two gang unit sergeants during the afternoon of August 2 for supposed erratic driving in South-Central Los Angeles. After fleeing on foot and then being taken into custody, according to the LAPD’s press release, Abrego sustained a “laceration” and died after being transferred to the hospital. One of the sergeants was treated for a broken hand.

The *Los Angeles Times*, however, reported that Abrego suffered a severe concussion, as well as “multiple facial and body contusions.” Autopsy results are pending.

Meanwhile, on Tuesday the Los Angeles Police Commission, by a vote of four to one, renewed Chief Charlie Beck for another five-year term, at \$325,000 annually, despite recent disclosures that he padded LAPD statistics on crime rates, failed to discipline officers found to have committed misconduct, and was caught lying about his daughter’s selling the LAPD her 10-year-old quarter-horse for \$6,000.

The recent LAPD shootings occurred during the 49th anniversary of the Watts Riots, which raged from August 11 to 17, 1965, triggered by the police roughing up a 21-year-old motorist and his mother. Police and

National Guard troops deployed to the predominantly African-American, working-class neighborhood killed 34 and injured more than 1,000 others.

The class tensions expressed in the Watts Riots have only grown more intense, as unemployment in Los Angeles remains over 8 percent, about double the rate before the 2008 financial collapse, while wages stagnate and social programs for the working class continue to be cut back despite staggering accumulations of wealth by a few.



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