

Second St. Louis area police shooting highlights unrestrained police violence in the US

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On Wednesday, St. Louis police released a video showing the killing of 25-year-old Kajieme Powell a day earlier. The killing of Powell came just ten days after the fatal police shooting of 18-year-old Michael Brown, which sparked mass protests in the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson, Missouri.

The video shows Powell behaving erratically after he reportedly took two energy drinks and a pastry from a nearby store. None of the handful of bystanders seem threatened by Powell. Two police officers arrive on the scene, guns drawn. Within 20 seconds Powell is dead, killed by a barrage of twelve bullets, fired by both officers, over a duration of three seconds.

The final two shots, fired by both officers, take place as Powell is already motionless on the ground. “Put your hands up!” yell the officers, and then handcuff him.

Residents had told the *World Socialist Web Site* that Powell was mentally handicapped and that his mother had died shortly before he was killed by the police.

“I think officer safety is the number one issue,” said St. Louis Police Chief Sam Dotson, defending the officers’ actions, saying, “The officers did what I think you or I would do, they protected their life in that situation.” Dotson dismissed questions as to why officers did not use Tasers or other means to diffuse the situation short of deadly violence.

The video contradicts Dotson’s claims that Powell rushed the officers with a knife in an “overhand” position, and was three to four feet away when he was shot. The video shows police started shooting when Powell was about nine feet away, based on measurements relative to the officers’ height, and that Powell had his hands down when he was shot. Neither

of the officers has been disciplined.

The shooting of Powell shocked eyewitnesses. The man filming the video can be heard saying, “They just killed him. Here we go again. They just killed this man. He’s dead. They putting him in cuffs. And he’s dead. Oh my God.”

The killing of Powell is the latest in a string of police murders. Police agencies throughout the country act as laws unto themselves, with a license to use deadly force at the slightest provocation. Despite the claims of the Obama administration, the killing of Michael Brown has only deepened the police’s hubris and hostility to the population.

The police defense of the killing of Powell—and the lies used to justify this killing—mirror the response of New York City police to the July 17 killing of Eric Garner, who suffocated to death when NYPD officers put him in an illegal chokehold and piled on top of him. Earlier this month, New York police unions held a press conference defending Garner’s killing, blaming him for his own death at the hands of the police.

“There is an attitude on our city streets today that it is acceptable to resist arrest,” said Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association president Pat Lynch. “That attitude is a direct result of the lack of respect for law enforcement.” These types of attitudes are not only tolerated, but actively encouraged by the media and entire political establishment.

A case in point was a column published earlier this week in the *Washington Post* by Sunil Dutta, a professor of Homeland Security at Colorado Tech University, entitled, “I’m a cop. If you don’t want to get hurt, don’t challenge me.”

“Here is the bottom line,” writes Dutta. “If you don’t

want to get shot, tased, pepper-sprayed, struck with a baton or thrown to the ground, just do what I tell you.”

He adds, “Don’t argue with me, don’t call me names, don’t tell me that I can’t stop you, don’t say I’m a racist pig, don’t threaten that you’ll sue me and take away my badge. Don’t scream at me that you pay my salary, and don’t even think of aggressively walking towards me.”

He adds, “You don’t have to submit to an illegal stop or search. You can refuse consent to search your car or home if there’s no warrant,” even though just a few lines above he asserts the right of police to shoot anyone who does not obey their orders. From this it follows that either police never make illegal demands, or that whatever they demand is legal.

The essential conception expressed in the comments of Dotson, Lynch, and Dutta is that police can do anything they want—including taking lives—if they claim the slightest threat. “Aggressively walking” becomes the justification for being shot.

The logic of these arguments is deeply authoritarian. In this, it is entirely in line with the pseudo-legal justifications of the Obama administration and the political establishment as a whole for the destruction of every basic democratic right. On the basis of claims that it is necessary to protect “public safety,” the executive asserts the power to spy on the population, detain anyone indefinitely without charge and even kill, without due process.

The military-police takeover of Ferguson, Missouri, and the imposition of what amounts to martial law in the city, exposed the essential target of all of these measures: the working class in the United States.

Obama’s attorney general, Eric Holder, was the point person in arguing that the president of the United States has the power to assassinate US citizens, including within the United States, who are declared to be “terrorists.” Holder just finished a public relations trip to Ferguson, where he sought to leverage the fact that he is African American to posture as sympathetic to those protesting the murder of Brown.

Given the Obama administration’s track record on democratic rights, its claims that it is pursuing a “fair and thorough” investigation of the Brown killing are entirely fraudulent. Darren Wilson, who fired multiple rounds into Brown at close range, including two shots to his head, has not been arrested and no charges have

been laid against him. The administration has made no criticism of the failure of local or state authorities to arrest him.

The Obama administration is meanwhile mobilizing so-called “community leaders” allied to the Democratic Party to defuse ongoing protests and channel popular anger back behind the political establishment. Local politicians and church leaders have sought to delegitimize and even criminalize those who are too stringent in their demands for change, denouncing them as “outside agitators.” One local Democratic Alderman went as far as referring to participants in the demonstrations as “insurgents.”

The aim is to criminalize all protests against police violence that do not accept the antidemocratic framework dictated by the ruling class and its political representatives.



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