

Felony charges dropped against Detroit cop who killed seven-year-old girl

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A Michigan Court of Appeals on Monday sanctioned the dropping of felony charges against the Detroit policeman who shot and killed seven-year-old Aiyana Stanley-Jones on May 16, 2010. The trial of Officer Joseph Weekley is coming to a close, with the jury considering only a relatively minor misdemeanor count of the careless discharge of a firearm.

The three-judge panel rejected—on procedural grounds—a prosecution appeal of last Friday’s decision by Wayne County District Court Judge Cynthia Gray Hathaway to drop the felony charge of involuntary manslaughter against Weekley. The cop, who shot and killed Aiyana with a machine gun, was the first one in the house in a predawn “no-knock” raid by a Detroit police SWAT team.

The media had suggested that Hathaway would deny the routine motion by Weekley’s defense attorney to drop the manslaughter charge for lack of evidence. In a previous trial last summer—which ended in a mistrial—Hathaway had rejected the same motion. This time, the judge upheld the attorney’s contention that the prosecution failed to present evidence of willful negligence necessary to sustain a manslaughter charge.

During the trial the defense argued that Weekley’s submachine gun went off accidentally when Aiyana’s grandmother, Mertilla Jones, allegedly grabbed it—a claim Jones has vehemently denied. The prosecution countered that Weekley had been trained to keep his finger off the trigger unless he made the decision to fire at a specific target. This meant the gun should not have fired even if Mertilla Jones had grabbed for it.

Approving the defense motion, Judge Hathaway—whose husband is a Wayne County Deputy Sheriff—declared, “There is no evidence that supports willfully disregarding care ... I am going to err on the side of the defense.”

The trial has been a whitewash of the brutal killing of Aiyana Stanley-Jones and the urban warfare methods employed by police in Detroit and around the country. Weekley was part of a paramilitary Special Response Team, which prior to forcefully entering the residence threw a “flash-bang” grenade through the front window. The explosive landed on the couch where Aiyana was sleeping with her grandmother and burned the little girl. The grenade—which is used in military raids in Afghanistan and Iraq—is designed to create a loud noise and a blinding flash of light to disorient “enemy” subjects.

Outrageously, an “embedded” Arts & Entertainment (A&E) network video crew filmed the police assault on the Detroit home for the reality television show “The First 48.” Then-Detroit Police Chief Warren Evans authorized not only the “shock-and-awe” methods of the force, but the department’s relationship with the media. During his tenure Chief Evans used the media to promote his reputation as a tough cop who would “do whatever it takes to keep this city safe,” placing the blame for street crime, not on the intolerable conditions facing residents in the economically ravaged former Motor City, but on so-called lawless offenders.

This policy was endorsed by the Democratic political establishment, which has long ruled in Detroit. At a funeral for a police officer killed in a previous “no-knock” raid, then-Mayor Dave Bing called for a law-and-order crackdown in the city. “We collectively will bring this city back and make sure that those few who disrespect the leadership in this city, the officers in this city, [know] that we’re not going to stand by and take this anymore, the madness has to stop.”

The chief perpetrators of the violent “madness,” however, are the police themselves. Just last month, 77 people were killed by police violence throughout the

US. The events in the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson, Missouri—where police violently suppressed mass protests against the killing of unarmed teenager Michael Brown—exposed the universal character of the militarization of local police departments.

The wrist-slap for the Detroit cop paves the way for increased police repression in the city as it goes through a bankruptcy restructuring that will only exacerbate social inequality and tensions. While city worker pensions are slashed, low-income residents are deprived of water and entire neighborhoods, deemed too poor for investment, are essentially shut down, hundreds of millions of dollars are being poured into the downtown area to create an upscale housing and entertainment district. That is why all of the chief players in the bankruptcy—including the billionaire real estate developers and their minions in both big business parties and the media—are demanding ever more heavily armed police to protect them.



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