

Notes on police violence in America

## Another asthmatic man dead after being tackled by New York police

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Police in the United States killed 14 people in the first eight days of October, according to a list compiled by volunteers on Wikipedia. This figure does not include an additional four killings by the New York City Police Department (NYPD) in the past two weeks, from the end of September to October 8. A few of the atrocities recently committed by police and other law enforcement officials follow.

### Another asthmatic dies in NYPD custody

On Wednesday, 46-year-old asthmatic Daniel Levitt died after being tackled and arrested by two NYPD officers in Queens. This is the second such case in New York City this year. Eric Garner, also asthmatic, died after being placed in a choke-hold by police on Staten Island in July.

Levitt, a former electrician living on disability, was in very poor health. In addition to severe asthma, he also recently received a pacemaker. His father, Daniel Levitt, Sr., told the *New York Times*, “Even with the pacemaker, he’s still a strong kid, but he can’t even run a half block.”

Levitt was arrested in early August for petty larceny and possession of stolen property, accused of stealing an iPad mini worth about \$300 from a Queens electronics store. Levitt was released and ordered to appear at his arraignment hearing the following month, a fairly common procedure for minor cases in New York. When Levitt failed to appear, according to police, the judge wrote a bench warrant for his arrest. Levitt’s family, however, disputes that Levitt had any outstanding warrants.

The arresting officer in the case, after recognizing Levitt riding a scooter through the Ridgewood neighborhood in Queens on Wednesday afternoon, chased after him in an unmarked police car. After Levitt clipped the side of a car

and fell off of his scooter, he got up and ran until the cop and his partner tackled him to the ground and arrested him.

Levitt went into convulsions as the officers brought him to their car. The policemen do not appear to have taken this seriously: one witness told the *Huffington Post*, “I said [to the police], ‘The guy’s turning blue. He might need some help,’ but the cop said, ‘Nah, don’t worry. He’s faking it.’ But he was gasping for air.”

The officers eventually removed Levitt’s handcuffs after he lost consciousness and called for paramedics. He was taken to Wyckoff Heights Medical Center, where he was pronounced dead shortly afterward. Although an autopsy is still pending, Levitt’s father noted that his body had fresh bruises on his torso and neck that had been covered up by bandages.

### Georgia SWAT team kills Georgia man in his home during illegal no-knock raid

A SWAT team in central Georgia killed a 59-year-old man in his own home during a nighttime raid, acting on a false tip from a drug addict who had stolen his car.

On September 24, Rodney Garrett, a known addict, turned himself into the Laurens County Sheriff Department. Garret alleged that he had found 20 ounces of methamphetamine in a plastic bag at the residence of David Hooks, a local businessman and contractor for nearby military bases, before stealing his SUV.

At 11 pm that same night, a SWAT team assembled outside Hooks’ home. David’s wife, Teresa, terrified at the sight of men in black camouflage, woke her husband up and told him the burglars had returned. David grabbed his shotgun and went downstairs.

According to a statement from Hooks’ attorney, police

burst through the back door of the house and fired “in excess of 16 shots” from “both 40 caliber handguns and assault rifles. Several shots were fired through a blind wall at David with the shooters not knowing who or what was on the other side of the wall.”

Police never knocked or identified themselves, despite being required to do so by the terms of the search warrant they had obtained. Moreover, lawyers for the family allege that the warrant itself was illegal, based as it was entirely on the testimony of an unreliable witness who had just stolen the family’s car.

Police exhaustively searched the house after the raid, and failed to uncover any drugs whatsoever.

### **Florida inmate found dead after reporting threats by prison guard**

Latandra Ellington, an inmate in Ocala, Florida’s Lowell Correctional Institution, was found dead on October 1, 10 days after writing a letter to her aunt alleging that a prison guard had threatened to kill her.

In the letter, Ellington wrote that the guard, whom she referred to as “Sgt. Q,” had threatened to beat her to death. The guard then allegedly grabbed a nearby radio and threatened, according to Ellington, to “bust me in my head.”

At the time of her death, Ellington had been placed by the prison administration in confinement, allegedly for her “protection,” after the letter came to their attention. According to a private autopsy paid for by her family, Ellington sustained blunt-force trauma to her abdomen, indicating that she had been punched or kicked to death.

The Ellington family’s lawyer, Daryl Parks, co-wrote an open letter with the Florida NAACP to Eric Holder, asking the federal Justice Department to launch its own investigation.

### **NYPD officer steals \$1300 from man’s pockets, pepper sprays him during stop-and-frisk search**

An NYPD officer stole \$1300 from a construction worker during a stop-and-frisk search in Coney Island, Brooklyn. The brazen theft was committed in full view of several angry bystanders (as well as other police officers) and caught by eyewitness phone video, later uploaded to the Internet.

Officers singled out Lamard Joye after he shouted at

officers making a separate arrest. The video clearly shows a cop pushing Joye against a chain link fence, rummaging through his pockets and pulling out a wad of cash, to howls of anger from the assembled crowd. When Joye turned around to face the officer and angrily demanded his money, the officer pepper-sprayed him in the face. The officer also sprays Joye’s sister at the end of the 30-second video.

The Brooklyn District Attorney has announced a probe to investigate the incident.

### **North Carolina police suspected black teenager of burglarizing his own home**

Police in a Raleigh, North Carolina suburb on Monday pepper-sprayed a black teenager in the home of his white foster parents, after a neighbor mistook him for a burglar.

Eighteen-year-old DeShawn Currie was in his house alone after school Monday afternoon when he heard a commotion outside and went downstairs to investigate. He was met by several police officers with guns drawn, responding to a 911 call from a neighbor about a possible burglary. The officers refused to believe that he lived at the house and rejected his explanation that the family had just recently moved into the neighborhood and that the neighbors might not have known who he was.

According to Currie, the officer questioning him turned to a family picture on the mantle and asked: “How can you tell me you stay here when all the kids in the picture are white?”

At that point, Currie became incensed and resisted attempts by the officer to handcuff him. The officer then pepper-sprayed him. When the rest of the family returned home later that evening, they found DeShawn handcuffed in the back of an ambulance.

Stacy Tyler, Currie’s foster mother, told the media that the family is distraught over the incident. “My five-year-old didn’t understand why they hated him and wanted to hurt him....My husband had nightmares the whole first night about having to fight the police off from being in the wrong house.”



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