

Denver police caught on video beating suspect, tripping pregnant woman

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A local television station in Denver, Colorado released eyewitness footage this week of a shocking police beating that occurred just days after the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri this August. The video shows an officer striking a subdued and unarmed suspect in the head six times, bouncing his head off the pavement, grabbing his pregnant girlfriend by the ankle and throwing her face-first to the pavement.

Officers from the Denver Police Department (DPD) arrested David Nelson Flores, a Honduran immigrant, on August 14 for two counts of felony drug charges. As two plainclothes narcotics officers approached Flores in his vehicle, which was stopped in a parking lot near downtown Denver, he stuffed a white sock filled with what the officers believed to be heroin into his mouth.

Flores refused to show his hands to the officers, and they “assisted” him out of the car, where they “fell to the ground” in a scuffle, according to the official police report. Uniformed officer Charles “Chris” Jones IV and his partner Christopher Evans arrived as backup to assist with the arrest. The four officers are shown on the video pinning Flores to the pavement with his hands behind his back.

The video, obtained by Denver television station KDVR, shows that Jones then punched Flores hard in the face six times, his head bouncing off the parking lot pavement. There was no apparent provocation, Flores was unarmed and had already been subdued. Jones can be heard in the video yelling, “Spit the drugs out! Spit the drugs out!”

Jones justified the beating in his official report by absurdly claiming that he was concerned that an officer’s arm had been injured after being trapped under Flores’ body, and that he also was attempting to retrieve the sock from Flores’ mouth and prevent him

from choking.

KDVR also obtained photographs taken inside Flores’ ambulance which show multiple cuts and bruises on his face and a still-bleeding wound on the back of his head.

While police were beating Flores, his seven-months-pregnant girlfriend, Mayra Lazos-Guerrero, approached the scuffle, screaming in anguish. Jones then grabbed her by her left ankle and threw her to the pavement, where she landed on her stomach. Jones claimed in his report that he thought that Lazos-Guerrero was going to kick him. However, as the video clearly demonstrates, Lazos-Guerrero was standing still, her leg planted in the ground, when Jones attacked her.

Lazos-Guerrero was then arrested for obstruction, drugs and child abuse, the latter because a child was in the car during the arrest.

An officer takes note during the video that they are being filmed, and yells out “camera” to his colleagues. Levi Frasier, the eyewitness who provided the video to KDVR, alleges that police confronted him after the arrest and attempted to delete the video from his tablet. “The first officer that comes up to ask me about my witness statement brings me to the police car and says we could do this the easy way or we could do this the hard way,” Frasier told the station, “It was taken as ‘You can either cooperate and give us what we want or we’re going to incarcerate you.’”

Frasier alleges that he was forced to sign a witness statement “under duress” that absolved the officers of any wrongdoing. Although the local copy of the video was deleted from Frasier’s device, a backup had already been automatically saved to a cloud storage service. It was this copy that he later showed to KDVR, although his friends urged him to delete this copy as well to avoid police retribution.

The FBI's Public Corruption Unit is now looking into the incident, the station reported Wednesday. An earlier internal investigation by the Denver Police Department cleared the officers involved of any wrongdoing.

Although the DPD alleges that they had not seen Frasier's video during their investigation, police radio traffic from during the arrest indicate that one of DPD's several hundred "HALO" (High Activity Location Observation) street cameras recorded the incident from about 4 blocks away.

The department declined an offer by KDVR to view Frasier's recording, but DPD chief of staff Matt Murray told the station, "We would love to talk with him [Frasier] if he has further information. We want that information and if there is misconduct we will happily investigate that and report that to the community." He went on to deny allegations of a cover-up as "irresponsible and baseless."

Hardly a day passes in the United States without a new report of a police killing, beating or other act of violence. No doubt only a minority, like the beating of Lazos-Guerrero, are videotaped and have broader public exposure.

Police throughout the country are increasingly running roughshod over the elementary rights of the population. The decision by a highly manipulated grand jury not to indict Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson will only encourage the confidence of police that they will be exonerated by a pliant justice system.



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