Police shooting of teen provokes protests in Berkeley, Missouri

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On Tuesday evening, 18 year-old Antonio Martin was killed in an altercation with a police officer outside a Mobil gas station in the Missouri suburb of Berkeley, a working class area just northwest of St. Louis.

The killing immediately sparked protests in the surrounding community as hundreds gathered to oppose another police homicide. The killing comes amid weeks of protests throughout the US in response to police violence.

According to police, at 11:15 pm on Tuesday evening, an unnamed officer shot and killed Martin while on a "routine business check" at the gas station, which was later changed by officials to a robbery call. Local officials seized upon the existence of a firearm recovered at the scene as well as grainy video camera footage of Martin raising his hand before he was killed as self-evident proof that Martin had threatened the officer.

"The events in Berkeley are a reminder that law enforcement officers have a difficult, and often dangerous, job in protecting themselves and law-abiding citizens," said Missouri Governor Jay Nixon of the killing. Berkeley Mayor Theodore Hoskins, a Democrat, told news reporters that "[y]ou couldn't even compare this with Ferguson or the Garner case in New York," referring to the killing of unarmed teen Michael Brown last August in nearby Ferguson, and the strangling of Eric Garner in New York City a month earlier.

Hoskins continued, "Everybody don't die the same… Some people die because they initiate it, and at this point, our review suggests police did not initiate it." He added that the community "should all put our arms around the police officer to make sure that he has all the needs and the help to bring him through this."

The officer responsible for Martin's death had been involved in a prior incident involving force with a firearm. It has also come to light that the officer had been issued a body camera the day of the killing but had chosen not to activate it. At the same time, the police cruiser's dashboard camera had been off during the shooting.

Rather than reprimand the officer, Hoskins confirmed that he would not be punished for failing to have his camera on. Similarly, St. Louis County Chief of Police Jon Belmar sought to cover for the officer, saying in a press conference that "[the officer] said he clipped it somewhere in the car, didn't put it on, and next thing you know you're here," in reference to the killing.

After the killing of Martin, protests broke out at the scene of the shooting, with police arresting several demonstrators after two officers reported being injured by rocks and a firework device that was set off near the station.

The wanton police killings of Garner, Brown and others have sparked massive outrage throughout the country, as protesters have taken to the streets to oppose wanton police brutality. In return, peaceful demonstrators have been subjected to mass arrests by police officers dressed in military-grade riot gear and carrying assault weapons.

"I understand police officers have a job and have an obligation to go home to their families at the end of the night… But do you have to treat every situation with lethal force?" asked Orlando Brown, 36, who was one of the protestors. Brown told *USA Today* that in addition to being pepper sprayed by police, he had seen a friend of his arrested for "failing to disperse." "It's not a racial issue, or black or white. It's wrong or right," he added.

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