

Notes on police violence in America

Detroit area police caught on video beating handcuffed suspect

Tom Hall
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Police in Detroit were caught on bystander video Monday, January 12, beating a carjacking suspect as he lay face-down on a residential sidewalk.

Police from a multi-departmental auto theft task force chased carjacking suspect Andrew Jackson Jr., a 51 year-old black man, for a quarter mile Monday morning before subduing him on the sidewalk in front of local resident Emma Craig's Detroit home. Craig grabbed her cell phone and began filming when she saw the officers beating Jackson while handcuffing him.

The video shows an officer lying on top of Jackson and punching him repeatedly in the back of the head while a colleague kicks him in the legs. Jackson, exasperated, begins calling out to Jesus after they have finished, enraging one of the officers. "What's that? Jesus? You're calling Jesus?" he yells, planting his knee into Jackson's back. "You f---er, don't you dare! Don't you f---ing dare!" According to Craig, one of the officers also pistol-whipped Jackson before the recording. Officers did later recover a pistol from Jackson's waistband.

"That's a justified (expletive) whipping," a female officer can be heard saying later on in the video.

Michigan state police, responding to a request from Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy, announced that they would open an investigation into the incident. Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan released only a brief statement saying that the county prosecutor was "monitoring the incident" and that Detroit Police would "cooperate fully" with the investigation.

Grosse Pointe Police Chief David Hiller, whose officers serve on the joint task force, defended the beating. "He curled up in a ball and his right hand again went under his clothing," Hiller told the media. "Fearing for their safety and those in the immediate area, an officer delivered a kick to the thigh area of the subject thus allowing the other officers the ability to arrest the subject."

Emma Craig's son Ron Craig condemned the beating in

Thursday's *Detroit News*. "He was in handcuffs. You had him captured. He was no threat." Craig said. "It's not a race issue, it's a humanitarian issue."

Mistrial declared in murder trial of South Carolina police chief

A jury in South Carolina was unable to reach a verdict Tuesday in the murder trial of Richard Combs, former police chief of a small town outside of Columbia. Combs was charged with murder in the shooting death of an unarmed 53 year-old black man Bernard Bailey in May of 2011.

The judge declared a mistrial after the jury spent twelve hours in deliberations, which voted 9-3 in favor of conviction. Prosecutor David Pasco says that he intends to try the case again.

The killing resulted from the simmering resentment that Combs, formerly the sole officer of the Eutawville police department, had for Bailey after he intervened in a traffic stop Combs carried out against his daughter two months prior, according to prosecutors. Combs told the court that Bailey, who arrived after receiving a call from his daughter, acted aggressively. However, prosecutors played a video from his police vehicle's dashboard camera which showed Bailey behaving calmly, even politely saying goodbye to Combs.

Combs secured a warrant against Bailey for obstruction of justice, but declined to carry it out for nearly two months, until Bailey arrived at town hall the day before his daughter's trial to discuss the ticket. Bailey left the building after being informed of the warrant, but Combs followed him outside to his pickup truck, where he tried and failed to handcuff him. Combs claims that he was caught by the door of the truck while trying to prevent him from leaving, when

the truck began moving in reverse.

It was at that point, allegedly fearing for his life, that he pulled his gun and shot Bailey three times, killing him. Prosecutors disputed Combs' story, citing the fact that Bailey's foot was on the brake and that the handcuffs were found close to three shell casings from Combs' gun when crime scene investigators arrived. They also argued that Combs acted improperly by following Bailey to his car.

NYPD Inspector General's report exposes lax penalties for chokeholds

A new report issued on January 11 by the New York Police Department's Inspector General reveals that the Department routinely lets officers off the hook in internal disciplinary proceedings for using chokeholds against suspects, a practice that is explicitly banned by department policy.

The study focused on 10 instances between 2009 and 2014 where police officers used chokeholds against suspects. It points out as "particularly alarming" that chokeholds are often used "as a first act of physical force in response to verbal resistance." The report also notes that the "Police Commissioner routinely rejected [the civilian oversight board's] disciplinary recommendations in substantiated chokehold cases without explanation."

Pat Lynch, the head of the Patrolman's Benevolent Association, declared that "if anything, the report reveals the dysfunction and anti-police bias that is rampant in the investigations." Mayor Bill De Blasio, who has faced a quasi-mutiny by the NYPD in recent weeks due to his conciliatory remarks towards Eric Garner protesters, responded to the report by pointing to the fig-leaf "retraining" program under his administration.

Iowa police officer shoots and kills woman after being startled by her dog

On January 6, a police officer, Jesse Hill, in Burlington, Iowa killed shot and killed 34 year-old Autumn Mae Steele while intervening in a domestic disturbance after being startled by her dog.

Hill, escorted Steele to her family home Tuesday morning after being released from jail on a misdemeanor domestic abuse charge. At some point she physically confronted her

husband, Gabriel Steele, as he was loading their four-year-old son into the car.

As the officer intervened, the family's German Shepard jumped onto his back, according to Steele's neighbors. He then fired two shots from his sidearm while falling to the ground, apparently aiming at the family's dog, striking Steele once in the torso in front of her husband and child. The incident was also witnessed by several neighbors, many of whom spoke to the local media. She was taken to a nearby hospital where she was declared dead a short while later. Hill was reportedly treated for dog bites.

Police have declined to comment on the case, calling it simply an "officer-involved shooting" and that it is currently being investigated.

Police kill another man holding a pellet gun in Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh police shot and killed 47-year-old Leslie Sapp III, who was holding what was later found to be an airsoft gun, last Tuesday while arresting him at his home on child rape charges.

Police declined to say whether Sapp actually pointed the toy weapon at officers, saying only that he "adopted, presented it in a manner consistent with what one would use when trained to use a handgun against officers." Sapp's fiancée told the media that Sapp's pellet gun, which had laid around his house for years, did not even work.

The District Attorney said that Sapp was shot seven times. A neighbor told the *Pittsburgh Tribune* that she saw six to eight bullet holes in the wall of the stairwell. "I just got instantly sick ... I didn't go up to the landing because I couldn't stomach it."



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