

Notes on police violence in America

Dashboard camera captures shocking beating of Detroit-area auto worker

Tom Hall
27 March 2015

Dashboard camera footage released Tuesday captured the shocking beating of Floyd Dent, a 57-year-old African American and longtime Ford worker, during a routine traffic stop last January after he ran a stop sign with an expired license.

The two-and-a-half minute video shows two officers walking up to the driver's side door and immediately dragging Dent out of his car, guns drawn. Dent was then wrestled to the ground, placed in a chokehold, and punched several times on the top of his head, causing blood to gush from his head and onto his shirt.

When he attempted to protect his face with his arms, police shot him with a taser three times. By the end of the video several officers from six responding vehicles swarm over Dent's prone and defenseless body. At no point throughout the entire video does Dent put up the slightest resistance.

Dent claimed in a press conference Wednesday that the police threatened to kill him, yelling "Get out of the car! I'll blow your head off!" The threats were not captured by the video because none of the responding officers were equipped with microphones.

Dent was then charged with assault, resisting arrest, and possession of cocaine, which police claim they found underneath his seat. The officer who punched Dent claimed that Dent had bit him, but did not seek medical attention for the alleged bite, nor were photographs taken of the alleged bite marks.

The assault and resisting arrest charges were thrown out, but Dent still faces the drug charges, which he strenuously denies. His attorney, Gregory Rohl, alleges that additional, unreleased footage shows police planting the cocaine. One of the officers in the video was charged in 2003 with planting evidence and

falsifying reports while with the Detroit Police Department but was found not guilty.

"I'm lucky to be living," Dent told a local TV station. "I think they was trying to kill me, especially when they had choked me. I mean, I was on my last breath. I kept telling the officer, 'Please, I can't breathe.'"

Atlanta-area police kill unarmed man at his job while serving arrest warrant

On Tuesday, police in Smyrna, Georgia killed Nicholas Thomas, a 25-year-old African American man, while serving a warrant for his arrest at his job at an auto repair shop.

Police advanced on Thomas to arrest him for violating his probation, as he was pulling a customer's Maserati sports car into the shop to be worked on. At that point, Thomas drove the car out of the shop and attempted to flee, but was shot and killed by police, who fired into the car. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

Smyrna police released a statement claiming that Thomas was attempting to ram the officers when he was shot: "Mr. Thomas drove around the building several times in a reckless manner and at a high rate of speed. Mr. Thomas drove the vehicle at Officers, placing them at risk to receive serious bodily injury or death, at which point one Officer fired into the moving vehicle."

This is contradicted by eyewitness Brittany Eustache,

a customer at the store, who says that she saw the episode unfold inside the store from a few feet away. “They were standing behind the car, opening fire. He wasn’t driving towards them,” she told local media. “The car was not moving when they began to shoot at him. The car had been stopped. He hit a curb. He couldn’t go any further.”

“So at no point was he making any aggressive moves?” the reporter asked her. “None, none at all. They immediately opened fire,” she said.

Thomas’s parents are calling for an independent investigation, and his father Huey called the shooting “murder” in comments to the media. “Looking at where the car is positioned, I don’t think any police officers were in front of it,” he said. “Looking at the gunshots, nobody was in front of it.”

Virginia police kill man in his own home after lengthy chase

Police in Portsmouth, Virginia shot and killed Walter Brown, a 29-year-old black man, in front of his wife in his own home on Tuesday afternoon.

Police stopped Brown in his vehicle several miles away while investigating drug activity, police said. Brown refused to get out of his car and led officers on a five-mile chase, before finally stopping in front of his house and fleeing inside. Police say they tased Brown on the front porch, but that it had no effect.

Three officers chased Brown through the front door of his home, while his wife Octavia looked on. Police fired a second taser to no effect as the chase spilled into a bedroom. Officers then claim that Brown took out a gun, at which point they shot him between three and five times, killing him. Police claim that they found a knife and unspecified drugs and weapons at the scene.

Octavia was ordered out of the room and did not witness the final shooting, but “heard it all,” according to an interview with local media. “They told me to get out of the room. I heard the shot. They had him in a chokehold. The police had him by the neck.” She denies that Brown had a gun. “No. He did not. I’m his wife and I know he did not,” she said.

“He was a family guy. He was all for his kids and his

family,” she said. “They “constantly beat him, and beat him, and beat him. Then tased him like he was a dog.”

New Orleans-area high school pulls piece with anti-police slogan from art exhibit

A piece of artwork by a local high school student was pulled from an exhibit at a mall in Terrytown, a suburb of New Orleans.

The piece, ironically painted to resemble a police recruitment poster, shows an officer with a nightstick pointing and smiling at the viewer, with a picture of a pig on his badge, while figures in the background stand with their hands raised. A slogan above and below the officer reads: “Join the Force & Get Away with Murder.”

The piece evoked a bristling response from the local political and media establishments. Jefferson Parish council member Chris Roberts proclaimed that the art teacher who supported the work “deserves no place in a classroom. If we continue to label an entire profession with such hatred and ridicule then this entire nation will end up like NOPD struggling to fill its force to protect their community.”

School officials defended their decision to pull the piece by citing the school system’s student publications policy, which states, “Freedom [of speech], however, does not confer upon students a license to destroy the school itself...Therefore, it is incumbent upon the professional staff to define the limits of students’ freedom of speech respecting school affairs to protect the state’s compelling interest in maintaining a school atmosphere conducive to an orderly program of learning.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact