

Notes on police violence

Man dies after arrest by Baltimore police

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A 25-year-old man died Sunday, one week after an apparent assault by Baltimore police that severed 80 percent of his spinal cord.

A cell phone video of the April 12 incident filmed by a bystander shows Freddie Gray with his hands cuffed behind his back screaming in pain as officers drag him to a police vehicle. Thirty minutes later police transferred him to an area hospital, where doctors determined he suffered from severe spinal injuries.

Bill Murphy, an attorney for the victim's family, said that 80 percent of Gray's spinal cord had been severed near his neck. "He lapsed into a coma, died, was resuscitated, stayed in a coma and on Monday underwent extensive surgery at Shock Trauma to save his life," Murphy said. "He clung to life for seven days." Murphy said that he would like to know what happened in the thirty minutes between the arrest and the time Gray was transported to the hospital.

According to a report in the *Associated Press*, while Gray was in the hospital Baltimore police asked that he be charged with carrying a switchblade knife, which carries a maximum \$500 fine and one year in prison. Records filed by the police do not explain Gray's injuries. Police merely report, "the defendant suffered a medical emergency and was immediately transported to Shock Trauma via medic." Police claim that Gray fled on noticing the presence of police and was stopped after a foot chase.

There has been no official police report on the incident and the names of the officers involved have not been released, nor have the officers apparently even been questioned.

Murphy said that he believed the police were keeping quiet until they came to an agreement on a scenario of events absolving the officers of responsibility for Gray's death. He said he has so far interviewed 11

witnesses to the incident.

On Monday about 50 protesters gathered in front of City Hall and later marched to police headquarters, where they unfurled a banner reading, "Stop police terror."

The Baltimore city administration says it has launched an investigation into the circumstances leading to Gray's death, but Murphy said the family claimed it would not be objective. "We have no confidence the investigation will reach the truth." Members of Gray's family have declined to meet with city officials.

In a television interview Murphy noted that it is not unusual for the city to promote a police officer even after he has been found culpable of brutality.

Inkster, Michigan police officer charged in beating of auto worker

A police officer in the suburban Detroit community of Inkster has been charged with assault in the wake of a brutal, videotaped beating of an auto worker. William Melendez has been charged with mistreatment and assault, both of which are felonies. The officer was fired from the department last week.

Police pulled over Floyd Dent's car in January after he allegedly rolled through a stop sign. Video shows the cops dragging the 57-year-old Dent out of his car and repeatedly punching the unresisting man in the head. Dent was also kicked and hit three times with a taser. He suffered four broken ribs, a fractured orbital and cranial bleeding.

The beating of Dent became public in March when a

local TV news station released video of the attack by officers.

Another video shows Dent, profusely bleeding, being stripped and searched by cops at the police station. In a statement to the press Dent said he repeatedly asked to be taken to the hospital.

"I'm not a mass murder, I mean they treated me like I killed 100 people," Dent said. Only later did police finally send him for medical treatment.

Police later claimed they found drugs in Dent's car, which he says were planted. That charge has been dropped as has a charge of resisting arrest. A video of the incident showed the cops apparently planting drugs in the car.

Melendez has been noted for his brutality and had been nicknamed "Robocop" while working for the Detroit Police Department. He has been named in many civil lawsuits claiming excessive use of force.

In 1996 Melendez and his partner fatally shot an unarmed man multiple times as he was lying on the ground, according to a lawsuit. The city of Detroit paid a \$1 million settlement, but kept Melendez on the job.

Melendez and seven other officers were acquitted in 2004 of federal charges of lying, falsifying reports and planting evidence. They had been accused by prosecutors of masterminding a plot to "run roughshod over the civil rights of victims."

The cop is currently being sued, along with six other officers, in connection with a 2011 assault on an Inkster man. The suit alleges the officers choked and beat Deshawn Acklin until he lost consciousness. The man was never charged with a crime.

San Antonio man dies after police tasing

Norman Cooper, 33, died early Sunday after being tased multiple times by San Antonio police officers. According to press reports police were responding to a domestic disturbance.

Police claim the man was "uncooperative" and fired a taser. After they fired a second taser the man became "unresponsive." The cause of death is under examination. Both cops involved have been put on paid administrative leave.

Cooper's family rebutted charges that the victim was violent or assaulted officers. "He's not and has never been a violent person. He doesn't really bother anybody and he loves children," said Cooper's father.

Cooper worked at a bank and leaves behind a two-year-old and 11-year-old son. "The oldest is just really taking it tough," said Cooper's mom. "That's his hero. He taught him to be one of the best youth football players in the city."

"We're just having a rough time with it right now. We just ask for prayers for our son and our family. It's just tough."

Pennsylvania cop charged in fatal shooting waives hearing

A Hummelstown, Pennsylvania police officer waived a preliminary hearing Monday on charges that she shot and killed a motorist during a traffic stop.

Lisa Mearkle allegedly shot 59-year-old David Kassick twice in the back on February 2 as he lay face down. A video from a camera mounted on a police stun gun appears to be the main evidence in the case. The video has not been released to the public. Both the officer and the victim are white.

The officer claimed self defense, alleging she thought Kassick was reaching for a weapon. Kassick, however, was unarmed. He was stopped for allegedly attempting to flee from a traffic stop. He was said to be driving with expired emissions stickers.

Christopher Slusser, an attorney for the victim's family, said he had seen the video of the shooting and noted that it "leaves nothing to the imagination."

"But I can tell you having that video, for me- I won't speak for the DA- but it made it very clear the DA had very little choice not to charge her."

Mearkle is meanwhile free on bail. She has been suspended without pay.



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