

Judge acquits Chicago police officer who killed unarmed woman in 2012

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On Monday, Cook County judge Dennis Porter threw out all charges against a Chicago police officer involved in the fatal shooting of Rekia Boyd in March 2012.

Judge Porter ruled that the prosecutors failed to prove Servin guilty of reckless actions and manslaughter. The courtroom, heavily guarded by police and security personnel, erupted in anger as Boyd's relatives and friends shouted down the officer and the judge.

On March 21, 2012, Dante Servin, the off-duty police officer who shot and killed Boyd, provocatively sought to quiet and disperse a large group of people enjoying a unseasonably warm March night in the highly impoverished Lawndale neighborhood.

According to witnesses, Servin began aggressively pointing his gun at bystander Anthony Cross, who was talking on his cell phone. The Chicago Police Department (CPD) maintained that Cross was pointing a gun at the off-duty officer, who sought to defend himself. Police never recovered a weapon. The disgruntled Servin fired at least five shots in Cross's direction and one bullet grazed his hand and hit the head of nearby Rekia Boyd, killing her.

Porter's ruling was little more than legalistic sophistry in defense of the police officer's actions. He claimed—under Illinois law and previous precedent—that a person who shoots a gun in the intended direction of a victim cannot be charged with manslaughter, but has to be charged with first-degree murder.

"It is easy to say, 'Of course [Servin] was reckless. He intentionally shot in the direction of a group of people on the sidewalk. That is really dangerous.' It is easy to think that way, but it is wrong. It ignores the law on this subject," said Porter, according to the *Chicago Tribune*.

Since prosecutors sought a charge of manslaughter

and reckless action instead of first-degree murder, the charges would have to be dismissed, according to Porter. On the basis of this legal technicality, charges of murder cannot be brought against Servin because that would constitute double jeopardy.

The trial itself was a rare instance of a criminal prosecution of a Chicago police officer for a fatal shooting. In November 2013, Cook County State's Attorney Anita Alvarez brought the charges of involuntary manslaughter, reckless discharge of a weapon and reckless conduct.

According to Alvarez, the charges were brought against the officer "only after a very careful legal analysis of the evidence as well as the specific circumstances of this crime." The judge himself delivered a rare instance of a "directed verdict," which is an order from a presiding judge to deliver a particular verdict.

Security personnel escorted several protesters and relatives out of the emotionally charged and tense courtroom. Boyd's mother Angela Helton tearfully told the press, "He literally blew her brains out. Her brains were lying in the alley... I don't like the justice system. They could have found him guilty of something! He murdered my daughter in cold blood!"

Martinez Sutton, Boyd's brother, spoke to a large crowd and condemned the ruling. He said the results of the ruling "tells you that anybody with a badge can kill any one of y'all out here." He added, "It's not about color anymore. It's people wearing the badge disrespecting their badge."

The ruling covering up the police killing of Boyd comes on the heels of a spate of police killings all across the country, with the full sanction of the political establishment. Police officers daily get away with fatal shootings and murder with legal impunity.

At the same time, in an effort to contain popular anger over police brutality, the City of Chicago recently announced two separate financial settlements.

The Chicago City Council approved a \$5 million settlement with the family of a teenager who died after being shot by a Chicago police officer 16 times last October. Federal investigators and FBI prosecutors were brought in to investigate the shooting of 17-year-old Laquan McDonald. The CPD alleged he was wielding a knife and “lunged” at police officers.

The city is paying the settlement while refusing to release police dash-cam video of the shooting. Aldermen, saying they themselves did not need to see the video, unanimously approved the \$5 million payment to McDonald's family.

City officials, with the backing of Mayor Rahm Emanuel, have also announced that a \$5.5 million reparations fund will be established for at least fifty victims of torture that occurred over a two-decade period under Police Commander Jon Burge. As recent reports by the *Guardian* show, torture at the hands of the Chicago police has continued, including at the Homan Square “black site.”



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