

Notes on police violence in America

Victoria, Texas police kill 25-year-old father with PTSD outside his home

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1 May 2015

Twenty-five-year-old Brandon Lawrence, an Afghanistan veteran with post-traumatic stress disorder, was shot by police multiple times outside his home last weekend while his family was inside. Lawrence was pronounced dead at a hospital the following morning, April 26. The two unnamed officers involved have been placed on paid administrative leave.

Police responded to a disturbance call last Saturday around 11 p.m., after Lawrence and a neighbor had gotten into an argument. Lawrence told his wife, Yasmine, that the neighbor had threatened to get a friend, come back, and shoot him. Police arrived at Lawrence's apartment with guns drawn and did not initially identify themselves.

Lawrence, holding a machete, was told by police to drop his weapon and come outside. Lawrence exited his apartment but held onto the machete, confused about the identities of the police officers. Eyewitnesses contradict the police department's claims that Lawrence charged at the officers with the blade.

"I don't understand why the police shot him," Boyce Bernal, a neighbor and close friend of Lawrence told reporters. "I'd understand it if he was charging them or swinging, but he wasn't." Yasmine said that her husband had just started a new combination of medication to treat his PTSD and "wasn't given a chance" to understand what was happening. "He was just standing. ... He wasn't trying to hurt anyone. He was just trying to protect us."

The police department claims to have body cam footage showing Lawrence advancing toward the officers. Neither said footage nor the initial 911 call have been released. "If Brandon really was targeting the officers, they would release that video, and they

would prove it," said Lawrence's father, Bryon Lawrence.

Yasmine criticized the police department's attempt to disparage her dead husband by raising his misdemeanor record at a press conference. "It just felt like they were trying to save their own asses." Lawrence's stepfather, Bruce Jacquot, expressed doubts that the investigation into the shooting would be objective. "I worry that I'm not going to walk away with the clarity I deserve."

Lawrence leaves behind two children, two-year-old Vivianna and one-year-old Hayden. "He was so excited to be a father," Yasmine explained. "He always talked about the things they would do together. ... That was just ripped away from him. He wasn't even given a chance."

Inkster, Michigan police department withheld video of officers celebrating bloody beating

In defiance of a court order, the Inkster Police Department kept secret for over a month footage of the police station booking of Floyd Dent, a 57-year-old auto worker beaten by police in January.

The video shows police officers laughing, fist-bumping, and re-enacting their brutal assault. Off-camera, Dent was being held in a nearby detention cell. He was not provided with immediate medical attention for the four broken ribs, traumatic brain injury, and fractured eye socket that he received from the beating.

Wayne County Circuit Judge David Groner had ordered the release of the footage on April 1. Dent's

attorney, Gregory Rohl, described Dent's booking process, "It looks terrible for them. From what [Dent] remembers about what happened in there, they were doing high-fives and stuff behind him, making fun of him." A heavily edited video was released by the police department two weeks later.

At the time, then Police Chief Vicki Yost claimed that the department had fully complied with the court order and had sent everything to attorneys and prosecutors. Rohl insisted that the police had released only 20 percent of the footage. There were two cameras, one in the reception area and the other in Dent's jail cell, recording the booking process, "but what they did was splice [the footage] together," Rohl explained. "I was advised by an officer that [the footage released] is incomplete and that her version is 21 minutes long, and she was rather disturbed by what she saw."

Floyd Dent was beaten by police officers following a routine traffic stop on January 28. Dent was charged with assault, resisting arrest, and possession of cocaine. The charges of assault and resisting arrest were dropped in late March, after dashboard camera footage was released showing officers placing Dent in a chokehold, punching his head, kicking him, and shocking him with a Taser. At no point did Dent put up any resistance. Dent and his attorney maintained that the cocaine was planted during the arrest.

The Wayne County Prosecutor threw out the drug charge against Dent last week, and charged one of the officers involved in the beating, William Melendez, with mistreatment and assault. Melendez was fired from the department, and Police Chief Yost resigned the same day. None of the other officers at the scene of the arrest or at the booking have been disciplined.

Yost herself was involved in a fatal police shooting nearly two decades ago, in 1996. 20-year-old LaMar Grable was killed by her partner, Sergeant Eugene Brown, while on patrol outside of their precinct. Police claimed that Grable ran away when the officers confronted him about a gun he was carrying. The only fingerprints found on the gun belonged to Yost. She refused to testify at the lawsuit filed against Brown, pleading her Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination.

19-year-old killed by police in Long Beach, California after looking at them

Police officers in Long Beach, California, killed 19-year-old Hector Morejon last Thursday while investigating reports of trespassing and vandalism of a vacant apartment.

Morejon, standing in the apartment next to a wall, was shot by police after reportedly turning to them, "bending his knees", and "extending his arm". The police department has acknowledged that the officers at no time spoke to Morejon. Police have not revealed the number of times he was shot, or whether he was armed.

Lucia Morejon, Morejon's mother, saw her son being taken to an ambulance and identified herself, wishing to accompany him. Police denied her access. Lucia and Sonya Mercado, the family's attorney, say that the youth's last words were "Mommy, mommy, please come, please come." He died shortly after arriving at the hospital.

Morejon's family is denying police claims that Hector was involved in gang activity, and is calling for an independent investigation by the US Justice Department. According to the *Los Angeles Times*'s Homicide Report, Morejon is the 41st person killed by Long Beach police since 2000.



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