

Los Angeles police shoot unarmed homeless man

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Brendon K. Glenn, 29, was shot dead by a Los Angeles police officer in Venice, California on Tuesday, May 6. Glenn was unarmed at the time he was shot.

In the days since Glenn's death, the Los Angeles authorities have systematically sought to cover up the shooting, and very few details have come to light. It is known that a surveillance video from a private business captured the shooting, but the Los Angeles Police Department has seized the video and is refusing to allow the public to see it.

On Thursday night, the LAPD held a "community meeting" near the scene of the shooting to attempt to defuse popular anger. Over four hundred people attended the meeting. However, the presiding LAPD officials refused to provide a full account of the shooting, condemn the officers involved or release the video. Instead, they urged the angry crowd, which interrupted the speakers with shouts of "murder!," to be patient while an investigation was conducted.

Community meetings and promises to investigate, followed by rubber stamp investigations that take months to complete, are the textbook "damage control" measures employed by police departments across the country following a shooting. These investigations are designed to whitewash the conduct of the police or, in the particularly egregious cases where that is impossible, to restore public confidence in the ability of police departments to "self-regulate."

While the LAPD is refusing to release the video, anonymous police sources have (perhaps deliberately) leaked a narrative of the shooting to the *Los Angeles Times*. According to this account, Glenn, a young homeless man originally from New York, had gotten into an argument with a bouncer outside a bar, not far from the famous Venice boardwalk.

According to these anonymous sources quoted in the *Times*, the video shows the officers struggling with Glenn and taking him to the ground, where they appear to gain control of him. However, the anonymous sources said, "One of the officers stood up and began to move away. As he did that, they said, [Glenn] began to stand up and started struggling with the second officer. For reasons that are unclear on the video, the sources said, the first officer then fires his weapon."

At least one witness tells a different story. "The cop said, 'Put up your hands' or something like that. 'Show me your ID.' And he went into his back pocket to pull out his I.D. and they shot him," witness Paris Edwards told a local news station. "They thought he had a knife or a gun. He had nothing. He had no gun, no knife, and he was dead in the street."

According to the police version of events, which at this point should be treated with the utmost skepticism, the officer fired at Glenn twice from a few feet away, striking him twice in the side.

Glenn died at the hospital that night. It is not clear at this point whether Glenn was handcuffed at the time he was shot. The police claim that no audio was recorded.

The LAPD's refusal to release the surveillance video, even though it was generated by an ordinary business, has no legitimate basis in law or policy. Instead, the LAPD's suppression of the video underscores the extent to which authoritarian forms of rule have become an accepted part of daily life in America. In practice, the police exercise the "right" to control what information is available to the public, and to seize and suppress information that places the police in a negative light.

It is obvious that the video is being suppressed out of concern that popular anger over social conditions and police brutality could boil over in a metropolitan region

of nearly 18 million people. Especially in light of the recent upheavals in Baltimore, Maryland, which were touched off by a police killing, the local political establishment is hoping to delay the release of the video as long as possible, or until more favorable circumstances are present.

While the video of the shooting itself has not been released, the media has obtained and played a different cellphone video from some weeks before the shooting, which apparently shows Glenn in an altercation with another man. Attempts to pollute public consciousness by demonizing shooting victims in the media is another standard “damage control” tactic, one that was also employed following the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri.

In an initial press conference after the shooting, Los Angeles Police Chief Charlie Beck admitted that he was “very concerned” about the fact that Glenn was unarmed. “Any time an unarmed person is shot by a Los Angeles police officer, it takes extraordinary circumstances to justify that, and I have not seen those extraordinary circumstances at this point,” Beck said.

Beck’s mealy-mouthed concession to popular anger provoked howls of outrage from the police officers’ union: “It is completely irresponsible for anyone, much less the Chief of Police, to render a judgement (sic) on an incident that is in early stages of investigation,” the Los Angeles Police Protective League protested in a statement. “As the final trier of fact in the use-of-force investigation and disciplinary process, the premature decision by the chief essentially renders the investigation process void. Additionally, by making his opinion public without having all of the facts, he influences the investigation for all parties involved, including his command officers and the public.”

In response to these protests, Beck retracted and “clarified” his initial statement, announcing that he will reserve judgment until the investigation is concluded. “I think I gave some factual statements about the state of the investigation, being very specific that this is not a conclusion that I am drawing and I will wait for the entire investigation to be presented to me before there is a conclusion,” he said.

The Los Angeles Police Department employs around 14,000 people, including more than 10,000 officers. Awash in “homeland security” and “counterterrorism” funds and hardware, it enjoys a bloated annual budget

of \$1.189 billion. Meanwhile, public education in Los Angeles has been subjected to years of crippling budget cuts, allegedly due to lack of funds.

Since the Rampart Scandal of the late 1990s, which exposed systematic brutality, beatings, killings, cover-ups, perjury, frame-ups and other criminal activity within the department, the LAPD has enjoyed the distinction of being one of America’s most corrupt and hated police departments. Since the beginning of the century, Los Angeles area police have killed an average of about one person per week.

In the days following the shooting, hundreds protested near the street where Glenn had been killed. Many protesters held up signs with the names and photographs of other young people killed by the police. A makeshift memorial has been erected on the site where he was killed.

Friends of Glenn told the *Los Angeles Times* that Glenn was known for his “hand hugs”—holding his friends’ hands before saying goodbye—and for freely telling people that he loved them. Some knew him by his nickname, “Dizzle.” He had a pet dog, a black Lab mix named “Dozer.”



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