

Notes on police violence in America

Judge orders release of photo showing Chicago cops posing as hunters with “suspect” wearing antlers

Evan Blake
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On Wednesday, an Illinois judge ordered the release of a Polaroid picture showing two Chicago police officers crouched, posing as hunters over an unidentified African-American man, who police have said was a “drug suspect.”

Jerome Finnigan, the officer on the left, is holding a pair of antlers above the man, while the other officer, Timothy McDermott, holds the man’s head up. Both officers are posing with rifles and clearly instructed the man to stick his tongue out and roll his eyes back, creating the image of a deer that had been hunted and killed by the officers.

The photo was taken sometime between 1998-2003 at the Harrison Police District on Chicago’s West Side. Harrison is roughly a mile south of Homan Square, which was recently revealed to be an off-the-books “black site” where police have tortured and sexually assaulted detained Chicagoans.

After the photo was presented by federal prosecutors to the Chicago police board in 2013, they narrowly voted to fire McDermott in a 5-to-4 vote. The dissenting opinion argued that the grotesque photo only merited a suspension, while the majority wrote that “appearing to treat an African-American man not as a human being but as a hunted animal is disgraceful and shocks the conscience.”

Finnigan, on the left in the photo, had already been fired in 2011 and sentenced to 12 years in federal prison for leading a notorious gang of cops involved in robberies, home invasions and other crimes. McDermott, who is appealing his dismissal in court, has testified that he regrets taking the photograph, and

that he “made a mistake as a young, impressionable police officer who was trying to fit in.”

The photo is merely the latest in a string of revelations, above all those concerning Homan Square, that underscore the deeply criminal character of the Chicago Police Department. While Chicago has one of the most notoriously corrupt political and police establishments in the U.S., comparable conditions exist in virtually every major American city.

Suicidal man killed by police in St. Augustine, Florida

On May 11, 28-year-old Justin Way was killed by police in St. Augustine, Florida while lying in bed with a knife. Way, a recovering alcoholic recently fired from his job, had been drinking and expressed suicidal thoughts to his girlfriend Kaitlyn, prompting her to call a nonemergency hot line to take him to the hospital.

Despite explicitly stating in the phone call that she did not feel threatened, St. Johns County Sheriff’s deputies Jonas Carballosa, 26, and Kyle Braig, 32, arrived minutes later toting assault rifles, and instructed Kaitlyn to wait outside. Moments later, Justin was shot dead.

The Way family was subsequently given an initial report by Detective Mike Smith, in which officers allege that they were attacked by Justin with a knife. They also claim that they were told Justin had threatened Kaitlyn, which she denies. Smith callously told Justin’s mom, Denise Way, that the officers “told Justin to drop the knife and he didn’t—so they shot him because ‘That’s what we do.’”

Smith further sought to whitewash the officers’

responsibility for the killing by telling the slain youth's mother about "this new trend in law enforcement now—it's called suicide by cop." This term has become a blanket justification used by police in recent years to immediately exonerate themselves and cover up their ever-more ubiquitous brutality.

The Way family contests the police story of the killing, and asserts that the evidence they've been presented with so far suggests that Justin was lying in bed when police shot him. Justin's father, George Way, asks, "If Justin was coming after them with a knife, at 6-foot-4, wouldn't there be blood splattered all over the room?" George asserts that blood only touched the mattress, with none on the walls or the floor, and that he believes a hole in the middle of the mattress suggests that police removed a bullet from the bed.

Four days later, on May 15, two different St. Augustine officers fatally shot another suicidal man, 53-year-old Cary Lloyd Martin. Police allege that Martin fired shots at them with a rifle, prompting them to return fire. Martin was hospitalized, and died a week later on May 21.

Carballosa, a deputy involved in the Justin Way shooting, had previously declared on Facebook: "Most people respect the badge. Everyone respects the gun."

Man with screwdriver killed in San Diego, California

On Wednesday, an unidentified 33-year-old man wielding a screwdriver was killed by a San Diego County Sheriff's deputy in Alpine, California. Police have again sought to tarnish the mentally ill victim and absolve the culpable officer of their responsibility by declaring that the officer was merely acting out his role in yet another "suicide by cop" scenario.

Lt. John Maryon shed crocodile tears for the slain man, saying "I mean, someone that's desperate to possibly kill themselves will—if they don't have access to a weapon that they can really harm themselves with—unfortunately they might reach out and find another weapon and cause us to do it for them. Very unfortunate."

Judge blocks release of video showing cop shooting unarmed man in the back

Earlier this month, a judge in Dauphin County, Pennsylvania denied a request by local news organizations to publish a video showing the shooting of an unarmed man by Hummelstown police officer

Lisa Mearkle.

Mearkle was charged in March with criminal homicide after investigators concluded that she shot David Kassick in the back as he lay on the ground following a traffic stop. The judge declared that the release of the video would "impair the Defendant's right to...impartial jury"



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