

Los Angeles cops who killed Ezell Ford set to be exonerated

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On Friday, June 5, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and their ostensible watchdog, the LAPD's Inspector General, have both determined that the two cops who shot and killed Ezell Ford, an unarmed, mentally ill black youth, last August were justified.

Ford, 25, was killed on August 11, 2014, two days after the police murder of 18-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. Protests erupted in Los Angeles alongside those in Ferguson, prompting the LAPD to conceal the officers' identities for over two weeks and suppress the autopsy report for over four and a half months.

According to two anonymous sources who spoke with the *Los Angeles Times*, LAPD Chief Charlie Beck and the LAPD's Inspector General, Alex Bustamante, will present whitewashed versions of the police killing at a private meeting of the Los Angeles Board of Police Commissioners (Police Commission) on Tuesday.

The Police Commission will then recommend a punishment, if any, to be meted out to the responsible officers, Sharlton Wampler and Antonio Villegas. Both cops have been reassigned to administrative duties since the shooting took place, and, barring any disciplinary action, will resume patrol duties following the investigation.

The Police Commission, created in the 1920s, is portrayed as an autonomous watchdog committee whose ostensible purpose is to keep the city's notoriously brutal and corrupt police force in check. In reality, members of the Police Commission are appointed directly by the mayor to provide a veneer of oversight that allows police to continue their reign of terror in working class neighborhoods.

In all cases of police shootings, the Police Commission allegedly decides whether the officers'

decisions to use deadly force "adhered to department policies," and whether their tactics were "appropriate." Regardless of their decisions, LAPD Chief Beck will have the final say on any disciplinary action, and will undoubtedly uphold the cop's so-called right to kill Ford.

The anonymous sources report that Bustamante has already found the shooting justified, but the officers' tactics inappropriate, while Beck approved of every aspect of the officers' criminal actions. Both investigators claim to have evidence that Ford fought for control over Wampler's gun, citing scratches on Ford's and Wampler's hands, as well as scratches on Wampler's gun. They also claim tests found Ford's DNA on the gun.

This spurious evidence bolsters the initial police story, which seeks to absolve the officers of any wrongdoing by repeating the standard claim that Ford was reaching for one of their guns. Aside from a brief outline of the supposed sequence of events, the police killing has been shrouded in secrecy ever since it took place last fall.

One glaring omission is why the cops stopped Ford in the first place. They initially claimed it was an "investigative stop," a vague term that essentially acknowledges the cops had no probable cause to detain Ford. The anonymous sources told the *Los Angeles Times* that police now claim they pursued Ford on suspicion of narcotics possession, yet the LAPD has never publicly stated that such suspicions prompted the officers' actions, nor were any drugs ever found on Ford.

Police initially claimed they attempted to stop Ford on a sidewalk, and then pursued him further after he "continued walking and made suspicious movements." They claimed Ford grabbed one of the officers, now

alleged to be Wampler, in an attempt to take his weapon.

Last August, several eyewitnesses immediately challenged the police version of events, with one saying that Ford was lying on the ground when one of the cops shouted “shoot him,” prompting the other to do so. Another eyewitness reported that a bystander filmed the shooting, and that LAPD confiscated the footage.

The coroner’s report found that Ford was shot three times, once each in the right side of his back, in his right arm, and in the right side of his torso. The shot to Ford’s back was fired from such close range it left a muzzle imprint in his skin.

Ford was known throughout his community, including by police, to be suffering from depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. In a federal civil rights lawsuit against the LAPD, his family contends the two officers responsible for his death were cognizant of his mental illness.

The LAPD ranks among the most brutal police forces in the US. So far this year, the LAPD has killed eight people, more than any other local police department in the country. Since 2000, LA cops have killed over 600 people.



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