

New York City police officers waited 20 minutes to report shooting of Akai Gurley

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New York Police Department (NYPD) officer Peter Liang waited nearly 20 minutes to report the shooting of Akai Gurley, a 28-year-old black man who was killed when Liang's weapon discharged on November 20 in an unlit stairwell in Brooklyn, according to a prosecution motion released by the Brooklyn Supreme Court last week.

Officer Liang fatally shot Gurley, who was unarmed, while conducting a "vertical patrol" with his partner Shaun Landau in the Louis H. Pink Houses. Vertical patrols are an NYPD tactic in which officers walk up or down the stairways of public housing buildings. Liang conducted the patrol with his gun drawn and claims his weapon went off accidentally.

A grand jury indicted Liang on February 10 of second-degree manslaughter and lesser offenses. Last week Judge Danny K. Chun denied a motion by Liang's lawyers to the dismiss charges. His trial date will be decided on September 29.

The prosecution's document, which includes evidence presented to the grand jury, exposes the disregard shown by Liang and his partner Landau for Gurley's life. After shooting him, neither Liang nor Landau checked on his condition. Landau "had heard the sound of running footsteps in the stairwell," according to his grand jury testimony, but did not investigate what happened to the individual subsequently.

Instead, the officers bickered about who should call their superior officers. During this time, Gurley and his girlfriend, Melissa Butler, ran down several flights of stairs before Gurley collapsed due to his injury. Butler then knocked on apartment doors before being able to borrow a cordless phone from a resident to call 911.

An Emergency Medical Services operator gave instructions to Butler on how to administer CPR to

Gurley, who had stopped breathing. Butler had no prior training in CPR. According to the document, at one point Liang and Landau—who both are trained to administer CPR—walked around Gurley and Butler, and did not try to assist her. Liang finally radioed for help, after witnessing Butler giving chest compressions to Gurley.

An investigation has shown that the bullet fired by Liang most likely ricocheted off the stairwell wall before hitting Gurley. Regardless of the reason Liang's gun went off, both officers showed a blatant indifference towards Gurley's life and were primarily concerned with how their superior officers would react to the incident. Liang texted his union representative.

Gurley's death is part of a pattern of police killings and harassment of workers and youth, particularly in poor and minority neighborhoods throughout the country. This finds acute expression in New York City's public housing, where NYPD officers have for years harassed residents, conducting vertical patrols, and arresting and ticketing residents for "loitering" in front of their own buildings or sitting on park benches.

Officers are rarely indicted under these circumstances, as was recently seen by the refusal to prosecute the cops involved in the deaths of Eric Garner, a Staten Island resident who died after being put in a chokehold by police, or the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri.

Liang's lawyers have contrasted the treatment of their client to the failure to indict retired Department of Corrections Officer Willie Groomes, who shot and killed 32-year old electrician Gilbert Drogheo inside Brooklyn's Borough Hall subway station on March 10 after an altercation.

Frequently charges against police officers are dropped, such as the case against Officer Richard

Haste, who was indicted for manslaughter in 2012, for killing unarmed Ramarley Graham. The case was dismissed on a technicality, and Haste was not indicted a second time.

In other recent cases, officers have faced reduced charges, such as Albuquerque Police officers Keith Sandy and Dominique Perez, who gunned down mentally ill homeless man James Boyd in March 214. Their charges were reduced from first to second-degree murder.

Liang's indictment, which by no means is guaranteed to result in a conviction, is intended to give the illusion of concern on the part of the political establishment and is aimed at ameliorating social tensions in the city, where there is wide scale public outrage over NYPD killings. At the same time, city authorities are rapidly building up New York's police force. Mayor Bill de Blasio recently announced his support for the hiring of almost 1,300 new officers, including a special heavily armed "counter-terrorism" unit that would be used against those who protest police violence.

De Blasio's Police Commissioner, William Bratton, has announced plans to roll out a new "community policing" strategy that would free up a considerable part of the police force from responding to emergency calls and allow it to focus more on active surveillance and targeting of working-class communities.



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