Notes on police violence in America

Dallas man dies after telling deputies he cannot breathe

Tom Carter
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Joseph Sheldon Hutcheson, 48, died shortly after he ran into the lobby of the Dallas County Jail yelling for help Saturday morning.

According to the Dallas County sheriff's office, Hutcheson arrived in a pickup truck and entered the jail's south tower around 10:00 in the morning. Hutcheson was saying that his wife was trying to hurt him. The deputies apparently handcuffed him and restrained him to get him to "calm down." He was pronounced dead shortly after 11:30.

April Berryhill, who was present at the jail, said that she saw "one sheriff's deputy with his knee on the man's back and another one with a knee on the man's throat," according to the *Dallas Morning News*.

Berryhill also said that before Hutcheson died, he was saying that he could not breathe, and that the color of his face changed from a pale white to a pale blue.

"He came in saying, 'Don't be scared of me. I just need some help.' They just tackled him as if he'd threatened their lives," Berryhill said. "He didn't have a weapon. He wasn't swinging at the officers. He just needed help."

Asphyxia (death by suffocation) is an increasingly common cause of death in police custody in America, whether from improper restraint or from direct compression on a person's chest. The police frequently interpret a suffocating person's attempts to breathe as resistance, justifying more force. Eric Garner's famous words—"I can't breathe"—while he was being strangled by NYPD officers have become a prominent slogan in protests over police brutality.

Fort Worth police shoot and kill man celebrating his 30th birthday

Police in Fort Worth, Texas shot and killed Phillip Vallejo while he was celebrating his 30th birthday. The police claim that he was waving a gun, which is disputed by his family.

"I grabbed him by the arm, 'Let's just go, let's just go,' then I just heard 'Put your hands up in the air,'" his wife Brenda Vallejo told WFAA, a local ABC affiliate. "And he did... Cops were behind him, and I just heard shots, pop, pop, pop, pop."

Phillip Vallejo was struck five times and was in critical condition at the hospital, where doctors were ultimately unable to save him. "He was a good dad, good husband," Brenda Vallejo said. "He always made us laugh and smile."

Cincinnati police union demands reinstatement of killer cop

On Thursday, the Fraternal Order of Police-Ohio Labor Council, the Cincinnati police union to which officer Ray Tensing belongs, filed grievances alleging that Tensing was wrongfully terminated. On the same day, Tensing was arraigned on murder charges for killing Samuel DuBose on July 19. Tensing pleaded not guilty.

Tensing shot DuBose during a traffic stop, which was initiated because DuBose was allegedly missing a front

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license plate. Body camera footage shows Tensing abruptly shoot DuBose in the head after Tensing appears unsuccessfully to try to open the driver's side door. According to Hamilton County Prosecutor Joe Deters, Tensing "lost his temper because Mr. DuBose would not get out of his car."

On video, Tensing tells other officers, "I thought he was going to run me over," which clearly never happened. Another officer says, "Don't say anything." The video also exposes Tensing's claims that he shot DuBose because he was "tangled" and "dragged" by the car.

The position of the police union reflects the violent and antidemocratic attitudes that predominate within police circles. The union is provocatively demanding the immediate reinstatement of Tensing "with back pay, sick time, vacation time, holidays, shift differential, and pension contributions," according to *USA Today*.

Man dies after being tasered in Fitchburg, Massachusetts

Wilmer Delgado-Soba, 38, of Fitchburg, Massachusetts, went into cardiac arrest about 20 minutes after being tasered by police officers on July 30. The police allege that he was causing a disturbance inside a market in Worcester, Massachusetts. The deceased man's mother told an interviewer in Spanish that the officers' actions were "not justified for the crime he committed."

According to data collected by Amnesty International, around 500 people died after being tasered between 2001 and 2012 in the United States. The "Truth Not Tasers" blog has documented 916 deaths following Taser use in North America through January 10, 2015.

Junk science employed to justify police killings

A *New York Times* article August 2 sheds some light on the lucrative business of cooking up junk science to justify police shootings. The article highlights the case of psychologist Dr. William J. Lewinski, who has made a career out of testifying as an "expert" on behalf of police officers accused of brutal killings and beatings.

"When police officers shoot people under questionable circumstances, Dr. Lewinski is often there to defend their actions," wrote journalist Matt Apuzzo. "Among the most influential voices on the subject, he has testified in or consulted in nearly 200 cases over the last decade or so and has helped justify countless shootings around the country."

Dr. Lewinski is a representative of a growing industry of "experts" who specialize in using pseudoscience to help police officers escape accountability. Dr. Lewinski has testified on behalf of an Albuquerque police officer charged with the murder of mentally ill homeless man James Boyd, as well as on behalf of Oscar Grant's killer Johannes Mehserle, among many other cases.

Dr. Lewinski, who charges $1,000 per hour to testify at trial, specializes in offering psychological justifications for police shootings, in which he purports to determine what each of the participants thought and observed. He also testifies that police officers who give inaccurate accounts of shootings are really just experiencing memory loss.

Through his Force Science Institute, Dr. Lewinski has been directly involved in training tens of thousands of police officers. Dr. Lewinski has also produced a number of tendentious and one-sided "studies" designed to help exonerate police officers in court. Lisa Fournier, a Washington State University professor and an American Journal of Psychology editor, determined that Lewinski's studies were "invalid and unreliable."

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