

Notes on Police Violence in America

St. Louis police kill 18-year-old, send SWAT teams against demonstrators

Evan Blake
20 August 2015

On the one-year anniversary of the police murder of Kajieme Powell in St. Louis, Missouri, officers once again shot and killed an African-American youth, identified as Mansur Ball-Bey, 18. The murder took place roughly five miles from where Powell was shot to death. Over 100 people quickly gathered at the site of the shooting, including many protesters who had been commemorating Powell's life nearby.

As the crowd grew in size, numerous backup police arrived in full SWAT gear, along with an armored vehicle. The police ordered the crowd to disperse, falsely declaring, "This is an unlawful assembly." One reporter noted that they saw at least three people arrested and taken into custody.

As of yet, no witnesses to the shooting have come forward to contest the police version of events, which should nevertheless be given no credence whatsoever.

St. Louis Police Chief Sam Dotson claimed at a press conference Wednesday that while two officers were serving a warrant at around 11:30 am, two teenagers ran out of the home. Dotson alleged that Ball-Bey pointed a gun at the police, who responded by fatally shooting him, while the other teenager, as yet unidentified, ran away. One officer shot Ball-Bey three times, while the other shot him once. Dotson also reported that police made multiple arrests inside the house.

After hearing the official story alleging that Ball-Bey pointed a gun at police, Robert Phillips, 30, angrily told the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, "They always say that."

The rapid police suppression of this minor protest in St. Louis reveals the advanced state of decay of democratic rights in the United States. When a crowd gathers to express anger and protest, the response of the state is increasingly to send in heavily armed, militarized police to intimidate protesters and quell social opposition.

Death of Zachary Hammond points to possible police murder and cover-up

Officer Mark Tiller shot Zachary Hammond, a 19-year-old white youth, twice, once in the back of his shoulder and once in the chest, during an undercover drug sting operation in Seneca, South Carolina on July 26. New information released by the lawyers of Hammond's family points to the possibility that the youth was murdered to intimidate Hammond's date, the target of the sting operation, Tori Morton.

In a letter from attorneys Eric Bland and Robert Richter addressed to the US Justice Department, the lawyers assert that Morton "had additional criminal information regarding Adam Covington," the son of Seneca police chief John Covington and a former reserve officer for the Seneca police. The letter notes that Adam Covington has a history of receiving illegal favoritism within the department, and that he was sentenced to two years' probation and one year in prison on Thursday after pleading guilty to charges of theft of a controlled substance and misconduct in office.

An investigation by the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division found numerous other incidents in which Covington was suspected of similar misconduct, but was shielded by department officials due to the fact that he is the son of the police chief. Referring to a possible investigation into a 2013 burglary incident, one captain is quoted as having said, "this came straight from the big man that if you go forward with this it would be a career-changing move."

In the letter, the attorneys also cite law enforcement sources from a neighboring department, who claim that officers on the scene "desecrated" Hammond's body, raising Hammond's hand and high-fiving it. The letter also reveals that an eyewitness claims to have seen an officer place something from the back of their patrol car underneath Hammond's body after he had been removed from the vehicle. The lawyers note that this likely explains the "white powdery substance consistent with powder cocaine" that was found on Hammond's body.

In the past week alone, two officers from the department have resigned, including one who had been on the scene the night Hammond was shot.

In response to the letter, the Justice Department announced that it will launch its own civil rights investigation into

Hammond's death, but side-stepped the broader issues of nepotism and potentially a charge of murder by Tiller on behalf of reserve officer Covington.

Officers indicted for murder of handcuffed man whom they tased at least 14 times

Former officers Howard Weems and Marcus Eberhart of East Point, Georgia were indicted on multiple charges, including felony murder, in the April 2014 death of Gregory Towns, a 24-year-old unarmed black man whom the officers tased at least 14 times after handcuffing him.

The two officers chased Towns outside his mother's apartment complex, until he tripped over a tree branch and fell. As Towns struggled to walk, the officers handcuffed him and both repeatedly stunned Towns to force him to move, effectively using their tasers as cattle prods.

The autopsy report lists the death as a homicide due to the use of the tasers, noting that Towns died from "hypertensive cardiovascular disease exacerbated by physical exertion and conducted electrical stimulation." Towns's family asserts that the officers stunned him at least 14 times.

In his police report, Eberhart wrote that the taser gun inflicted little harm to Towns, noting, "Towns did not state he was in pain or appear to be in any distress." To elicit more pain, Eberhart states that he "then removed the cartridge from my taser to drive stun Towns." Eberhart wrote that he stunned Towns at least two more times before Towns fell into a creek bed, where Eberhart then stunned him again. When paramedics arrived moments later, they informed Eberhart that Towns did not have a pulse.

Officer charged with murder for shooting unarmed man with hands near his head

Officer Adam Torres has been charged with second-degree murder nearly two years after he killed unarmed John Geer, 46, who was holding his hands near his head at the time he was shot in Fairfax County, Virginia. The shooting took place on the afternoon of August 29, 2013, at the front door of Geer's house.

Police negotiator Rodney Barnes convinced Geer to place the weapon he was holding at his feet, yet Torres continued to aim his gun at the unarmed man. In the police report, Barnes noted that Geer repeatedly asked Torres to lower his weapon. At 3:34 p.m., while Barnes was speaking with Geer, Torres suddenly fired one shot at him without warning, surprising the other

officers.

Geer's father and a friend who witnessed the shooting, as well as every officer on the scene except Torres, asserted that Geer's hands remained above his shoulders when he was shot. Torres lied and claimed that he shot Geer only after "he brought both his hands down really quick near his waist."

Torres was placed on administrative duty shortly after the shooting, where he remained until being fired on July 31, 2015, as the ensuing internal investigation sought to whitewash the brutal police killing.

For months, the police withheld all details surrounding the case and whether or not charges would be filed, sparking a series of protests in the region. Not until last January, 16 months after the shooting, did police even release Torres's name for the first time.

After a full year had passed, Geer's longtime partner, Maura Harrington, filed a civil lawsuit on behalf of herself and Geer's daughters. Normally, civil lawsuits aren't even filed until the completion of a criminal lawsuit in cases of police shootings. Last April, Fairfax County settled the civil case for \$2.95 million.

Over 1,000 attend funeral of 19-year-old Christian Taylor

An overflow crowd of more than 1,000 people gathered at Koinonia Christian Church in Arlington, Texas on Saturday in remembrance of 19-year-old Christian Taylor, the unarmed African-American youth killed by Arlington officer Brad Miller on August 7.

The fatal shooting took place inside a Buick GMC car dealership, after six officers responded to a burglary call at around 1 am. Within minutes of arriving at the dealership, Miller shot Taylor four times without making any physical contact with Taylor. Taylor died of gunshots in his neck, chest and abdomen, according to the Tarrant County medical examiner's office.

Miller, himself a rookie cop still undergoing training, was publicly fired by Arlington Police Chief Will Johnson shortly after news of the murder spread. A criminal investigation is under way, with further measures left to the district attorney's discretion.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact