

Brutal crackdown on protest against police violence in St. Louis, Missouri

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The brutal police crackdown of a peaceful gathering of roughly 100 people near the site of the police murder of black 18-year-old Mansur Ball-Bey in a residential suburb of north St. Louis has once again brought to the surface the underlying drive toward police state rule in the US.

In the recent period, the First Amendment guarantee of “the right of the people peaceably to assemble” has been steadily stripped of its meaning, along with other democratic rights spelled out in the US Constitution.

Protesters first gathered Wednesday afternoon as news spread that Ball-Bey had been killed by police. At the time, many were commemorating the life of Kajieme Powell, the 25-year-old murdered by police exactly a year before, less than five miles from the house where police killed Ball-Bey. When they heard the news, some in the crowd went to the site of the shooting of Ball-Bey.

As the crowd gathered, St. Louis police responded immediately by calling for reinforcements. A SWAT team of roughly a dozen officers arrived in a Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) tank, donning full body armor, helmets and assault rifles. Dozens of other officers also arrived as backup, so that the police presence roughly matched the size of the small crowd of demonstrators and bystanders.

Over the course of the day, police arrested nine people on charges of impeding traffic and resisting arrest. After initially firing smoke canisters at protesters, police soon unleashed a hail of tear gas on the demonstrators. Video has surfaced showing the military-style methods used by police in suppressing the protesters.

In the video, officers can be seen clearing space for an MRAP tank to speed through at upwards of 25 miles per hour, with an officer mounted atop the tank firing at

least six tear gas canisters from a riot gun. The woman filming declared, “Police are driving down the street, shooting tear gas where kids are, and they’re chanting while they’re moving in! They are shooting gas on residential streets.”

She then commented on the peaceful character of the gathering, noting, “These people are actually standing here, not doing a thing, and they are shooting this [tear gas] into where their cars are, and kids are taking shelter. It was actually quiet out here moments before [the police] showed up.”

In a video taken later in the evening, police can be seen marching in formation, beating their nightsticks on the ground, in an effort to intimidate the few remaining protesters. At one point, the line stops, and an officer is heard leading chants of “Forward! March! Move!” as though he were a sergeant leading his squad into battle.

Ball-Bey’s family and friends have already come forward to denounce the police story of events, asserting that the youth had a bright future ahead of him and would never commit the crimes of which he has been accused. Ball-Bey graduated from McCluer South Berkeley High School in nearby Ferguson in May, held a steady job and planned to attend college in the fall.

Ball-Bey’s cousin Tyren Cotton-Booker wrote on Facebook, “They f---ed up. They shot the wrong person. And they know it.” Cotton-Booker highlighted the fact that Ball-Bey had no criminal background. Ball-Bey’s father, Dennis, is also convinced that police made a mistake and is consulting lawyers to investigate his son’s death.

Ball-Bey’s family claims that he had visited an aunt’s house to meet up with his cousins on his way home from work at FedEx, when police exited an unmarked car and confronted the youth. Moments later,

he was shot to death by the two officers. He was still wearing his FedEx uniform at the time police cut him down.

“I’ll be damned if I believe that he left work stopping by, not even being there over 5 minutes and pulls a gun out on the police. Naw, I’m not believing that one. Not at all!” Cotton-Booker wrote.

DeAndre Cody, another cousin, said the family is in a state of disbelief, and views the official narrative as highly suspect. He told the *New York Daily News*, “We just want the facts. We don’t believe the facts are being told. They won’t even tell us where they took his body.”

From the start, police have sought to tarnish the record of the slain youth, while concealing numerous details from the public. Their narrative so far is that the incident began when two officers issued a search warrant to Ball-Bey. They allege that at this point he aimed a gun at the officers, prompting them to shoot him a combined four times. St. Louis Police Chief Sam Dotson claimed Wednesday that police found crack cocaine and stolen guns at the home, and that an unnamed man and woman inside the home were also arrested.

Members of the community have given no credence to the police story of events.

Fred Price, a resident of the neighborhood where Ball-Bey was killed, told ABC News, “They provoked the situation. Situations like this make us want to keep the police out of the neighborhood. They’re shooting first, then asking questions.”

Dex Dockett, who also lives nearby, said, “Another youth down by the hands of police. What could have been done different to deescalate rather than escalate? [The police] come in with an us-against-them mentality.”

In the past year since the murder of Michael Brown by officer Darren Wilson, police across the US have become increasingly self-assured that their brutality against the working class will continue to receive full backing at the local, state and federal levels.

In St. Louis, local prosecuting attorney Robert P. McCulloch helped rig the grand jury proceedings to ensure a non-indictment of officer Wilson, admitting testimony he knew to be perjured. Months later, the Obama Justice Department completed the whitewash of Wilson’s murder of Brown by failing to bring civil

rights charges against the officer.

None of the recent egregious police murders has received even scant attention from the Obama administration, which has granted police across the US the de facto right to brutalize and murder workers and youth with impunity.

Last month, 125 people were killed by police in the US, an average of over four each day, according to *killedbypolice.net*. This matched the highest number of police killings in a single month since the web site began compiling news reports in May 2013.



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