

Video shows murder by San Francisco police firing squad

A reporter
4 December 2015

A group of San Francisco policemen cornered a 26-year-old man and opened fire on him at point-blank range, riddling his body with 15 shots Wednesday afternoon. The killing, graphically depicted in a video posted on Instagram, took place in the Bayview section of the city, one of its poorest neighborhoods. The video can be viewed [here](#).

The victim, later identified as Mario Woods, 26, was armed only with a kitchen knife, which he held onto despite being pepper-sprayed and shot with beanbag ammunition. Woods was making no move to attack police, and can be seen in the video backing away and raising his hands in front of him as though in self-defense.

Woods is backed into a wall by at least a half-dozen cops, all with guns drawn. He attempts to sidle along the wall to his right. Then one of the cops accosting him steps in front of him, cutting off his last route of escape. When Woods takes one further step, the cops open fire, while bystanders scream in horror.

The police were responding to a report by a stabbing victim who was receiving treatment at San Francisco General Hospital, who claimed he'd been attacked at Third Street and Le Conte in Bayview-Hunters Point. Woods was at that location when police arrived. The resulting confrontation was recorded on smartphone video by a witness on a city bus passing by.

When the uploaded video caused widespread outrage, the San Francisco Police Department sought to smear the victim, releasing a report that he had been identified as a gang member in 2009, affiliated with the so-called Oakdale Mob, and subjected to a civil injunction.

The "gang injunctions" issued by San Francisco authorities after 2006 amount to lifetime bans on individuals going to certain neighborhoods of the city, usually the poor neighborhoods in which they had

grown up and where their families live.

Eyewitnesses and acquaintances told the local press that Woods was no threat to anyone, someone who "wouldn't hurt a fly" and was frequently seen hanging around in the neighborhood smoking or drinking a beer.

Shawn Richard, a spokesman for Woods' mother Gwendolyn Woods, told the *San Francisco Examiner* that his family was shocked by the amount of force used by the police.

"The family is like, they're lost for words. The mom simply can't believe that her son was shot that many times and he did not pose a threat. He never pointed the knife in their direction," Richard stated.

San Francisco police chief Greg Suhr effectively confirmed the accuracy of the Instagram video, one of several of the killing. He said, "We have since recovered or found some video, they appear to show the officers encircle him and they appear to show the suspect moving toward the officer before the shots were fired."

Since Woods was surrounded at the time, any move in any direction would be interpreted as a movement towards a policeman, and therefore grounds for his execution by what amounts to a police firing squad. This is the sixth fatal shooting by San Francisco police so far this year.

At the same time, Suhr justified the police execution, declaring that Woods "had already demonstrated, by committing a felony aggravated assault, that he was a danger to others, so he could not be allowed to move away from the scene." In effect, Suhr was declaring Woods guilty of an offense for which he had not been arrested or charged, let alone convicted, and then prescribing the death penalty.

Public Defender Jeff Adachi told the *San Francisco Chronicle* that "the person was not posing a direct

threat and certainly did not have to be shot.” Officers in a situation like this one “can move back and at least order the person to the ground or use some other sort of defensive maneuver, rather than using a gun and shooting him point-blank,” he said.

“Based on what we see in this video, it does not look like the officer who fired the fatal shots was in immediate danger of being killed.”

Five policemen who fired shots into Woods have been placed on administrative leave, essentially paid vacations, while an investigation is carried out by the SFPD Homicide Division—i.e., the cops will be “investigated” by other cops.

The killing came on the eve of a vote by the San Francisco Police Commission on whether to allow policemen to view footage from their body cameras before writing incident reports. This is demanded by the police union to give cops the opportunity to devise more credible lies—ones that won’t be immediately disproven by video evidence.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact