

# New York police officer convicted of killing Akai Gurley

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On Thursday, a jury returned a guilty verdict for second-degree manslaughter and official misconduct against New York Police Department officer Peter Liang for the November 2014 killing of 28-year-old Akai Gurley, who was unarmed. After a more than two-week trial, it took barely over two days for the jury to reach its decision. Liang faces a jail sentence of up to 15 years.

The shooting occurred when Gurley and a girlfriend were walking down a stairwell in the Louis H. Pink Houses, a public housing complex in the East New York section of Brooklyn. At the same time, Liang and his partner were conducting a “vertical patrol” in the building. When Liang, gun already drawn, encountered the two young people in the darkened stairwell, his gun went off and the bullet ricocheted off the wall, wounding Gurley in the chest.

Instead of rendering immediate assistance, the two police officers delayed for nearly 20 minutes, debating what to do, while Gurley bled to death. An ambulance was summoned by the victim’s girlfriend, using a neighbor’s phone.

Gurley was the father of two young girls.

The verdict against Liang is remarkable primarily for the fact that, despite the large numbers of killings by police, there are so few indictments, let alone convictions. The last conviction of a New York police officer for the shooting death of a civilian took place over 10 years ago, in 2005.

The shooting of Akai Gurley came only four months after the choking death of Eric Garner by the New York police. None of the officers involved in that killing were indicted. The last trial for a police killing was in 2008, when three officers were acquitted in the shooting death of 23-year-old Sean Bell.

Liang’s lawyers argued that the shooting was a tragic

accident rather than a crime. However, the virtual police occupation of public housing complexes and working class neighborhoods in New York, under the infamous “broken windows” policy of police commissioner, Bill Bratton, appointed by the city’s Democratic Party mayor Bill de Blasio, creates conditions under which such “accidents” are inevitable.

Bratton himself stated that Gurley was “totally innocent.” Furthermore, the evident failure of both officers to render any assistance to the victim after the shooting represents gross, criminal negligence, indicating an attitude that such deaths are merely “collateral damage.” Despite this, the only change in the wake of Gurley’s death has been to intensify police activities.

Evidently conscious of the growing anger across the country against police violence, Brooklyn District Attorney Kenneth Thompson stated, after announcing the verdict against Liang, that the trial “had nothing to do with Ferguson,” referring to the 2014 shooting death of Michael Brown by police in Missouri.

In a sense, Thompson is correct. The conviction of Peter Liang stands in contrast to the overwhelming majority of such cases, in which police kill unarmed workers and youth with impunity. From Michael Brown to Eric Garner and so many others, no matter how clear the evidence of their culpability, the legal system is manipulated to protect police who commit murder. Consequently, the ever-more blatant brutality of police against the working class continues unabated.

In the latest reported incident, on Monday, police shot to death 17-year-old David Joseph in a suburb of Austin, Texas. The black high school senior, who was naked and unarmed at the time he was killed, allegedly was running toward the officer, Geoffrey Freeman, who is also black. There is no explanation why deadly force

was employed against a youth who clearly posed no serious threat to the officer.

In a scenario reminiscent of the 2014 killing of 12-year-old Tamir Rice, police sources indicated that the shooting of David Joseph took place within seconds of the initial encounter. Joseph's family has called for a thorough investigation.



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