

San Francisco police chief resigns after cops kill unarmed woman

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On Thursday morning, San Francisco police officers shot and killed an unarmed woman who had been driving a car that police suspected was stolen. Within hours of announcing the death, Police Chief Greg Suhr announced his resignation at the request of Mayor Ed Lee. This purely cosmetic gesture will do nothing to address the class roots of police violence in San Francisco.

The woman, who has not yet been identified, was sitting in a parked car in the Bayview neighborhood of the city and allegedly drove off when police approached her, immediately crashing into a truck and becoming stuck. Two unidentified officers claimed that she was not responding to commands and one of them shot her once in the chest as she tried separate the two vehicles. She was taken to San Francisco General Hospital where she died.

No weapon was found on the woman and the officers have not claimed that she presented a danger to anyone. This was the third fatal shooting of a suspect in San Francisco in the past six months and comes shortly after new revelations of widespread racism and criminality in the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD). Protesters have been demanding Suhr's resignation for several months, including a 17-day hunger strike that ended earlier this month.

Suhr, who was appointed chief by Lee in 2011, had always refused to resign, claiming he was carrying out important reforms to the department.

In a press conference at City Hall Thursday afternoon, Mayor Lee told reporters: "I have previously expressed confidence in Chief Suhr because I know he agrees with and understands the need for reform, but following this morning's officer-involved shooting...I have arrived at a different conclusion to the question of how best to move forward." Later, Suhr announced his resignation, saying of the shooting, "This is exactly the kind of thing, with ongoing reforms, that we are trying to avoid."

These ostensible reforms included \$17.5 million

proposed by Lee to train officers in de-escalation techniques after police shot and killed 45-year-old Luis Gongora in April. Police claimed that Gongora, a homeless man, had lunged at them with a knife, but surveillance footage near the shooting showed police rapidly approaching Gongora with guns drawn and firing within 30 seconds of getting out of their cars.

That killing followed the slaying of 26-year-old Mario Woods in December 2015. Woods had been suspected of assaulting a man earlier in the day, and had a knife when he was surrounded by police. Again police claimed Woods presented an immediate threat, but video taken by bystanders showed Woods completely surrounded and walking slowly when police shot him 20 times.

These are just the most recent cases of police killings in San Francisco in recent years which include Amilcar Perez-Lopez, who was shot in the back by plainclothes officers who claimed he was lunging at them with a knife; and Alex Nieto, a City College student who was killed when police mistook a Taser he had for a gun. No officers have been prosecuted in these cases.

In addition to these killings, nearly 20 officers have been directly implicated in two different exposures of racist and homophobic text messages. In April this year, text messages of Officer Jason Lai to at least four other officers were released showing regular use of racial slurs and disparaging remarks against African-Americans, Indians, Hispanics, and Asians. Lai is himself of Chinese descent. One of the more extreme texts referred to black people protesting the Baltimore police killing of Freddie Gray as "a pack [of] wild animals."

Far from being an aberration, a similar set of texts with Sgt. Ian Furminger at their center, were revealed in February 2014, implicating at least 14 officers. These texts talked about burning crosses and encouraged the killing of "half-breeds." Captain Jason Fox was the highest-ranking officer identified in this scandal.

In both cases, the racist texts were only brought to light in the process of unrelated investigations into the officers' criminal activity. Lai was under investigation for sexual assault. Although prosecutors declined to press charges on that accusation, he was eventually convicted of illegally accessing Department of Motor Vehicle records for personal reasons. Furminger's texts were discovered in an investigation of his theft of drugs and money from residents in the city's impoverished Tenderloin district. Furminger was convicted on four felony counts in February 2015.

More broadly in law enforcement, three San Francisco County sheriffs were charged in March of this year with forcing prisoners in the county jail to fight and betting on the results.

One of the particularly striking facts about the SFPD scandals is the racial diversity of the officers involved. Lai, of Chinese descent, was texting his hatred for black people to officers making disparaging remarks about Asians. Furminger, who is white, was texting racist remarks to the Hispanic and black officers he was engaging in criminal activity with. Two of the officers involved in killing Mario Woods, an African-American, were themselves black.

The racist views of individual cops are the manifestation of a more fundamental antipathy of the police force towards the working class as a whole. In the more impoverished parts of San Francisco, law enforcement exists as a particularly well-armed and financed gang that kills and robs with impunity.

While some protesters have presented this as the result of a racist culture among San Francisco police, the racism of individual officers is a symptom of the far broader rise in police violence nationally that cannot be explained by race, but rather by class. According *The Guardian* there have been a total of 390 people killed by police so far this year, nearly three a day.



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