

Third Baltimore cop let off in Freddie Gray murder case

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Baltimore police officer Caesar Goodson, Jr., one of six implicated in the Freddie Gray police brutality case, was acquitted of all charges Thursday morning. The not guilty verdict by Baltimore Circuit Judge Barry Williams was the third exoneration of the cops involved in the April 12, 2015 murder of the young African American man.

Last month, the same judge acquitted Officer Edward Nero of misdemeanor charges, and in December, he declared a mistrial after a jury failed to agree on manslaughter and other charges against Officer William Porter. The latest ruling makes it even more unlikely that the remaining defendants, Officer Garrett Miller and Lt. Brian Rice, will be held accountable. Their trials on charges of assault, reckless endangerment and misconduct in office are scheduled for July. Rice also faces a manslaughter charge.

Shortly after the social upheaval in Baltimore against the killing of Gray last April and June, Marilyn Mosby, the Maryland state Attorney, stood on the steps of the downtown War Memorial and called on the citizens of Baltimore and throughout the country to put their trust in the judicial system. Appealing to the protesters, she said, “I heard your call for ‘No Justice, No Peace.’ Your peace is sincerely needed as I work to deliver justice on behalf of this young man.”

The aim of Mosby’s appeal, along with those issued at the time by President Obama and the political establishment as a whole, was to dissipate mounting popular opposition to police brutality throughout the US and revive illusions in the deeply discredited judicial system. Far from securing justice, however, the courts, with the full backing of the Obama administration, have once again exonerated the killer cops.

After being arrested for carrying what the police

alleged to be an illegal switchblade, later found to be legal, the handcuffed 25-year-old was put into the back of a police van without seat belt restraints, against Baltimore police force regulations. He was then given what is commonly known in Baltimore as a “rough ride.” Gray suffered a severe spinal injury during the ride, which led directly to his death a week later. Officer Goodson was the driver of the van.

The incident was followed by explosive popular protests, and in turn, by a brutal crackdown on the citizens of Baltimore that involved mass arrests, a declared state of emergency, a citywide curfew, and the deployment of 5,000 National Guard troops, just 40 miles from the US capital of Washington, DC.

Believed to be the strongest of the six cases, Goodson was the centerpiece of the prosecution’s series of trials. Bearing the most criminal responsibility as the driver of the van, he was the only officer to be charged with the more serious crime of “depraved heart” murder, one carrying up to 30 years in prison. With the two acquittals and one mistrial in their favor, the police union is already putting pressure on Mosby to drop the remaining cases.

The events of both the Freddie Gray murder and the subsequent judicial charade is anything but an accidental or isolated case. Even before these incidents, the systemic character of police brutality and “rough rides” were well established in the city. Though known by other names such as “nickel ride” in Philadelphia, the act of giving a “rough ride” as payback to allegedly unruly prisoners is a common practice throughout the country. This practice involves purposely driving police vans in a manner to cause harm to detainees, who are deliberately handcuffed but not restrained in the vehicle.

An often cited investigation by the *Baltimore Sun*

revealed in 2014 the incredible frequency and scope of not just “rough rides,” but many forms of police brutality in the city of Baltimore. The study found that over the course of four years the city paid nearly \$5.7 million in settlements and court judgments in as many as 317 lawsuits for police misconduct.

As is becoming more and more apparent in the wake of media attention on US police brutality in 2015, the ongoing violent crackdown on protesters in France, and the recent police killings at an education demonstration in Mexico, the growing epidemic of police brutality is not a problem unique to Baltimore, or even the United States. Rather, it is the common response of the ruling elite internationally to the growth of working class opposition to inequality, deteriorating social conditions, and sanctioned state violence.

The facts of the Freddie Gray case fly in the face of this narrative spearheaded by “Black Lives Matter” and other middle class protest groups that police brutality is solely the result of racism. Baltimore is a city dominated by black political officials. Of the six officers involved, three are white, three black, one a woman. During the protests, the city’s black mayor, Stephanie Rawlings Blake, denounced protesting youth as “thugs.” The black state attorney Marilyn Mosby called for peace and “faith” in the justice system.

This has all been overseen by the first black president, who has militarized local police forces and authorized the crackdown on the citizens of Baltimore, turning the city into a military encampment complete with military grade weapons and the National Guard. Despite all the cosmetic civil rights investigations launched by the Obama administration, the president’s Justice Department has come down on the side of the police officers in every Supreme Court case involving police brutality, according to a survey by the *Washington Post* last year.

The failure of the prosecution to secure a conviction in any of these first three cases is another step in the legal sanctioning of state violence by consistently shielding murderous cops, even in the most blatant criminal cases.

Already this year there have reportedly been over 550 police killings in the United States, with only a tiny fraction resulting in convictions of the police officers involved. The source of police brutality and the militarization of the police force cannot be understood

in racial terms. It can only be understood by recognizing the fundamental class antagonisms that are tearing society apart.



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