

Protests erupt throughout the US against string of police killings

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Protests against police violence have been held throughout the country in the aftermath of the killings of Philando Castile in Falcon Heights, Minnesota and Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, Louisiana this week. Demonstrations began soon after the most recent shootings and are ongoing, with more demonstrations planned over the coming days.

In late-breaking developments Thursday night, reports emerged of a shooting at the end of a demonstration in Dallas, Texas. Four police officers were killed and seven others wounded. Very little is yet known about the incident and the motives of the shooters, though at least two people are in custody. The focus of news coverage was immediately switched from police violence to the attack on police officers, while downtown Dallas was shut down and residents ordered to shelter in place.

On Wednesday, 32 year-old Castile was shot and killed during a traffic stop in Falcon Heights, a suburb of St. Paul, Minnesota, in front of his fiancée and her four-year-old daughter. Protests broke out in the area overnight and continued yesterday.

Castile's fiancée, Diamond Reynolds, who was sitting in the front passenger's seat, broadcast the grisly aftermath live to the world over Facebook. Castile, a kitchen supervisor for a local school with no criminal record, can be seen in the video gasping for breath, blood pouring out of his arm and torso, before slumping over, apparently having succumbed to his injuries.

The video stream begins shortly after the shooting. The officer, apparently in a state of panic, continued to train his gun on Castile as he was dying in his seat, while cursing and screaming orders at Reynolds to keep her hands up.

Remarkably, Reynolds retained her composure and

explained the incident in detail. "We got pulled over for a busted tail light in the back [a detail which Reynolds now disputes], and the police just—he's, he's covered—he killed my boyfriend. He's licensed to carry, he was just trying to get out his ID and his wallet out his pocket and he let the officer know that he had a firearm and he was reaching for his wallet and the officer just shot him in his arm, and the officer just shot him in his arm... he just shot his arm off."

Later in the video, Reynolds is pulled out of the car by backup officers, who handcuff and arrest her. In the commotion, her phone falls to the ground but continues recording. Reynolds and her child can be heard sobbing in the background. The video picks up again with Reynolds in the back seat of a police car, asking her friends and family to pick her up from the station.

In a press conference Thursday outside of the Minnesota governor's mansion, Reynolds complained that police separated her from her daughter at the jail, failed to confirm that Castile had died until 3 a.m. the next morning, and did not release her until 5 a.m., according to CNN.

Minnesota Democratic Governor Mark Dayton called for an "independent" investigation by the FBI. Given the role of similar federal investigations in exonerating cops in previous police brutality cases, no confidence can be placed in such an investigation. Rather, it is a clear indication that a cover-up of the shooting is being coordinated with the highest levels of the American state.

The shooting in Minnesota was the second horrifying police murder caught on cell phone video in little more than 24 hours. Early Tuesday morning, Alton Sterling was tackled to the ground and shot execution style by police in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, an incident which was recorded by two separate eyewitness videos.

Louisiana Democratic Governor John Bel Edwards likewise announced a federal investigation into the shooting.

Officials and the media are already moving to condition the public to accept the likely outcome that Sterling's killers will go free. Baton Rouge District Attorney Hillar Moore told CBS yesterday morning that the murder of Alton Sterling was “potentially a state-authorized killing,” explaining that the law “gives law enforcement officers the authority and *mandates them* to kill when in defense of themselves or others [emphasis added].”

Since Sterling's death scarcely 72 hours ago, at least seven other people including Castile have been killed by US police, bringing the total for 2016 up to 602. In the vast majority of these cases, no eyewitness video is available and the police accounts of the shootings are almost invariably accepted without question by the corporate-controlled media.

Among the most recent killings is 44-year-old Jasen Scott Ramirez, who was tased and then shot seven times on July 1 by US Marshals in a church parking lot in Wyoming as he was leaving his father's funeral. “They should have called for an ambulance sooner!” one of his cousins told the media through tears, noting that the nearest hospital was only just down the street. “They wanted him to die!”

On June 25, police in Fresno, California shot and killed unarmed teenager Dylan Noble in a gas station parking lot. Video surfaced Wednesday of Noble's final moments. Noble is shown lying on the ground, still alive after having been already shot twice, when police fire two more shots at point-blank range.

The execution-style killing caught on video explodes police claims that officers “feared for their lives” and that they believe Noble was reaching for a gun in his waistband. However, even police officials admit that all four shots were fired over the course of two minutes, an extraordinary length of time which suggests a methodical and deliberate murder, not an act of self-defense.

And in Fullerton, California, outside of Los Angeles, 19-year-old Pedro Villanueva was killed and an 18-year-old passenger injured when undercover highway patrolmen fired into his moving pickup truck. Police followed him in an unmarked vehicle for several miles before trapping him in a residential cul de sac, and

claim they opened fire when he “made a U-turn and drove toward the officers,” the only possible direction he could drive on the road, according to the *Los Angeles Times*.

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to demonstrators at protests held yesterday in New York City and Washington, DC, each attended by thousands of people.

In Washington, DC, Lee expressed outrage over the killing of Castile, “This was an extrajudicial killing. It fits a pattern where the police operate with impunity.”

Antonio, a messenger who works in New York City, said, “It has been going on for a long time, but it is more controversial now. It is getting a lot more attention than before.” Rejecting the portrayal of police violence in purely racial terms, Antonio pointed out, “At this protest you can see everyone coming together. There are a lot of different races here.”

He continued: “Even if the police are allowed to get away with killing black people now, this is an issue that impacts everyone. If the police are allowed to get away with black people it will empower them. It empowers them to be able to kill anyone they want.”

John, a New York teacher, said, “I am out here to voice that I am opposed to violence and for equality of the people... In the last three years we have seen Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, and now Philando Castile. I don't even like protesting but this is the 10th time I have been out here in two years. After I heard that the police killed two people in the same 24 hours I had to come out.”

He added, “You see what is going on and you know it is just wrong. This is not about being white or black. It is simply knowing that police brutality is wrong.”



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