

Protests continue in Charlotte, North Carolina as police refuse to release video of fatal shooting

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Police in riot gear confronted angry residents of Charlotte, North Carolina Thursday, during a third night of protests against the police killing of Keith Scott earlier this week. Police are refusing to release video of the fatal shooting, with family members who have seen it saying that it shows no sign of aggression by Scott.

North Carolina's National Guard deployed on the streets of Charlotte Thursday morning after the state's Republican Governor Pat McCrory declared a state of emergency in response to protests. Charlotte Mayor Jennifer Roberts ordered a midnight curfew beginning last night.

To safeguard businesses, 367 National Guardsmen have so far been deployed to the city for "installation security." In anticipation of more protests, Wells Fargo, the city's largest corporate employer, told its 12,000 employees that non-essential personnel should work from home.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Chief Kerr Putney declared on Thursday that he would not "display a victim's worst day for consumption" by releasing the video. The police claim that Scott was only shot by plainclothes officer Brentley Vinson after Scott pointed a gun at officers. Scott's family asserts that he was holding a book, and other witnesses state that Scott was complying with officers' orders.

Family members were allowed to view the video on Thursday. Family lawyer Justin Bamberg released a statement: "When told by police to exit his vehicle, Mr. Scott did so in a very calm, nonaggressive manner. While police did give him several commands, he did not aggressively approach them or raise his hands at members of law enforcement at any time." Just before

he was shot and killed, "Mr. Scott's hands were by his side, and he was slowly walking backwards."

Taheshia Williams, whose apartment overlooks the parking lot where Scott was killed, told *CBS News*, "He got out of his car, he walked back to comply, and all his compliance did was get him murdered."

Chief Putney admitted in a press conference that the police video does not have "definitive visual evidence that would confirm that a person is pointing a gun."

The family has called for the public release of the video evidence.

To better obscure police activity from the public, Governor McCrory signed a bill going into effect in October that removes police footage from the public record. Unless the police departments choose to release the footage, only a person whose image or voice is captured is allowed to view the recording. If that person is deceased, a relative can request to view it, and no copies can be made without a court order. In Orwellian language, McCrory claimed the law would promote "clarity and transparency."

The police killing of Scott and the eruption of protests casts a harsh light on the immense social inequality in Charlotte, which parallels conditions throughout the country.

Charlotte was named one of the best places to live by *US News & World Report* in March. While one-fifth of Mecklenburg County residents make over \$115,000 a year, 13.6 percent of Charlotte's residents live below the official poverty line. In the part of the city where police killed Scott, nearly one-third of the population lives in poverty.

A 2014 study conducted by UC Berkeley and Harvard found that poor residents in Charlotte had less

social mobility than in any other big city. A child born in poverty there had only a 4.4 percent chance of earning an income in the top fifth of the population.

While the city's financial center has rebounded from the 2008 financial collapse, poorer workers are forced to contend with unemployment and low-wage jobs. The official unemployment rate among African Americans in the city is 11.6 percent.

Whatever role racism plays in particular police killings, the fundamental issue is class. In this regard it is significant that while Scott was African American, so was the police officer who reportedly killed him, Vinson; as is the police chief in Charlotte, Kerr Putney.

So far this year, police have killed 844 people according to killedbypolice.net. According to statistics maintained by the *Guardian*, African Americans have been killed this year at a rate of 4.86 per million, surpassed only by Native Americans at 5.49. Although whites are killed at a lower rate, they make up roughly half of those killed by police.

The promotion of racial politics is aimed at obscuring the basic class questions involved in the epidemic of police violence, which is a response by the ruling class to growing social anger and inequality.

Nervous about the possibility of widespread social unrest, the *New York Times* published an editorial on Thursday calling for the release of the video in Charlotte, warning that "keeping the public in the dark heightens tension and undermines trust in law enforcement."

The *Times* cited approvingly the decision by prosecutors in Tulsa, Oklahoma to charge Betty Shelby, the officer involved in the killing of Terence Crutcher on September 16, with first degree manslaughter. Even if she is convicted, Shelby would face a minimum of four years in prison.

These various efforts at damage control are aimed at diffusing anger while doing nothing to address the unending string of police killings. Since the August 2014 killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri sparked mass protests, police nationwide have killed well over 2,000 people. Hardly any officers are charged, and those who are charged are rarely if ever convicted.

The Obama administration, meanwhile, while presiding over the funneling of military weaponry to local police forces throughout the country, has used

federal investigations to whitewash police killings and has repeatedly refused to bring federal charges against any of the police officers involved in the murder of unarmed civilians.



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