Charlotte police release videos showing Keith Scott with arms down as he was shot

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In an effort to quell ongoing unrest, officials in Charlotte, North Carolina released multiple videos Saturday that show portions of Keith Scott's fatal encounter with police officers on September 20.

The fierce protests that erupted over Scott's death were met by an immediate official "state of emergency," the imposition of a curfew, and the activation of the National Guard. Protests continued for the sixth day on Sunday. On Saturday, hundreds demonstrated in front of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department headquarters in defiance of the midnight curfew. Heavily armed police units also prevented protesters from blocking traffic on a nearby freeway.

The Charlotte police originally refused to release videos of the Scott shooting on the grounds that it would only incite more anger. Charlotte Police Chief Kerr Putney directly opposed the release of the videos: "It will inflame the situation and make it even worse. It will exacerbate the backlash. It will increase the distrust." In other words, the more criminal the behavior of the state and its agents, the more reason for those crimes to be kept secret.

After angry protests continued unabated throughout the week, the Charlotte officials reversed themselves and released the videos Saturday. In one video, taken from a dashcam, Scott is shown calmly walking backwards. His arms are at his sides. His demeanor is not threatening or aggressive, and he appears to be listening to and complying with the officers' commands. It clearly shows that nothing is in his right hand, though it is not clear if anything is in his left hand (Scott was right-handed).

Another video, taken from a body camera, provides a shaky perspective of another officer present at the shooting, but with the audio preceding the shooting missing. Scott is mostly not visible in this video, except for one glimpse where his right hand is empty and relaxed at his side. Before cutting off, the video shows Scott being handcuffed as he lies on the ground moaning, while an officer asks for a bag from the back of his car.

Before the videos were released, Putney had claimed that they showed Scott had "something in the hand and that he pointed it at an officer." The video, however, shows nothing of the sort.

"It does not make sense to us how this incident resulted in the loss of life...and it's not clear in the videos that were released," Ray Dotch, Scott's brother-in-law, said in a statement.

Only part of the video evidence has been released, but police also released a photo purporting to show a gun by the feet of Scott's corpse. However, in cellphone video taken by Rakeyia Scott, Keith Scott's wife, no object appears in that area, leading to questions as to whether the police tampered with or planted evidence. While her view is partially obstructed by nearby vehicles, her voice can clearly be heard begging the police not to kill her husband.

"Don't shoot him. Don't shoot him. He has no weapon. He has no weapon. Don't shoot him. He didn't do anything," Rakeyia Scott tells the officers. "He doesn't have a gun. He has a TBI [traumatic brain injury]. He's not going to do anything to you guys. He just took his medicine." After a sudden burst of four gunshots can be heard, she screams, "Did you shoot him? Did you shoot him? Did you shoot him?"

A witness who saw the shooting, Taheshia Williams, told reporters that Scott was complying with the officers' instructions. "Obviously, complying still gets you murdered," she said, "because that's what happened." Williams also heard Scott's last words, which were, "What is the problem? What did I do? What's wrong?"

Another video has surfaced on Facebook of Scott's daughter staggering hysterically around the area of the shooting, screaming, "My daddy is dead!" On that video, police can be seen swarming the streets while local residents angrily confront them.

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The Charlotte demonstrations, developing spontaneously and fueled by mass popular anger over social inequality and the ongoing epidemic of police brutality, provide some indication of the explosive tensions in America. Hundreds of youth blocked local roads on the night of the shooting, facing down phalanxes of heavily armed riot police who fired tear gas grenades into the crowds and charged, tackled and handcuffed demonstrators.

Justin Carr, 26, was killed during the protests. During a chaotic melee with riot police, Carr was discovered with a gunshot wound to his head. Minister Steve Knight of Mission Gathering Christian Church in Charlotte declared via Twitter that Carr was killed by the police: "It was an ambush. The victim was shot while he stood between two ministers, and we believe he was shot by police." The authorities, meanwhile, have charged Rayquan Borum, 21, with his murder, and the motive is unclear. Carr's mother told reporters Friday that her son "died for a cause."

By now, the American population has had a long experience with police departments providing utterly fictional accounts of shootings that take place, only to shamelessly revise their stories later after video evidence contradicts the original story.

The police also routinely plant or tamper with evidence at the scenes of shootings. On September 22, St. Louis police officer Jason Stockley was charged with murder after a video emerged showing him executing Anthony Lamar Smith with an AK-47 and then planting a gun on him. A dashcam recorded Stockley during the pursuit boasting, "I'm going to kill this motherf-----! Don't you know it!"

The official media accounts have presented Keith Scott's death in purely racial terms, while presenting police brutality as a merely a pattern of crimes perpetrated by white police officers against unarmed black men. While racism is indisputably a factor in many police shootings, Brentley Vinson, the police officer who shot Keith Scott, together with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg police chief, who opposed the release of the videos, are black.

According to the web site killedbypolice.net, police have killed 849 people so far in the year 2016. In the five days since the death of Keith Scott, who was number 840, nine more people have been killed. Data aggregated and analyzed by the *Washington Post* reveals that black men represent about a quarter of the total number of deaths, while white victims account for approximately half.

Both widely despised presidential candidates for the 2016 US elections, Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump, have sought to exploit the events in Charlotte for their own ends.

Trump, who presents himself as the "law and order" candidate, addressed his sympathies to the police. "Hopefully the violence & unrest in Charlotte will come to an immediate end," Trump tweeted. "To those injured, get well soon. We need unity & leadership."

Hillary Clinton, for her part, attempted to adapt herself to the enormous popular anger over police brutality. "Charlotte should release police video of the Keith Lamont Scott shooting without delay," she tweeted on Friday, "We must ensure justice & work to bridge divides. –H" This missive was issued after three days of protests, and only the day before the Charlotte authorities released the videos.

Notwithstanding Clinton's cynical posturing six weeks before the elections, the Obama administration consistently defended police brutality in the Supreme Court, where the administration's lawyers insisted that the police should have "qualified immunity" from lawsuits based on violations of civil rights, such as the use of excessive force. Throughout the eight years of the Obama administration, the epidemic of police violence and the militarization of the police continues unabated, with local police departments receiving billions of dollars in grants and military equipment.

While Charlotte authorities released two videos over the weekend, a new North Carolina law goes into effect on October 1 that will bar the release to the public of any future recordings from police body cameras or dashboard cameras. The new law has the full support of the state's police organizations.

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