

Police kill 23-year-old man in Louisville, Nebraska

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On Wednesday evening at 7:12 pm, Cass County Sheriff's Deputy Tyler Reiff shot and killed 23-year old Austin M. Baier in Louisville, Nebraska, after the latter allegedly became aggressive during a traffic stop.

According to Sheriff's Office, Reiff had stopped Baier's 1992 Buick Century after receiving a complaint of reckless driving in which the young man's vehicle had been identified. After initially stopping at the officer's request, Baier accelerated again before getting out of his car to confront the officer. The officer then shot Baier. Witnesses recall hearing four shots fired.

Subsequent attempts by Reiff and medical personnel to revive the young man were unsuccessful and he was pronounced dead at the scene shortly afterward. Reiff has been placed on desk duty pending further investigation into the killing.

Baier had no prior criminal record and co-workers described him as "free-spirited" and caring. Meiah Yale-Barton, a co-worker of Baier's at Louisville's Main Street Café, told reporters from the *Omaha World-Herald* that Baier struggled with mental illness and access to medication.

In comments to the *Lincoln Journal-Star*, Baier's family members stated they suspected the young man might have been intoxicated at the time of the traffic stop.

The Nebraska State Patrol, which is investigating the killing, has released no information on whether Baier had been armed or whether he had threatened Reiff in any way to justify the shooting. Cass County Attorney Nathan Cox has refused to state whether any video footage of the altercation exists and has withheld the results from an autopsy conducted Thursday pending a grand jury review of the evidence.

According to a state law passed in April, a Nebraska grand jury is permitted to withhold the autopsy findings

until its review of a specific case has been concluded, which could take months.

Baier's death is the first officer-involved killing in Cass County since 2004, when sheriff's deputies were involved in a stand-off that ultimately took the life of an unstable man in the nearby town of Avoca (population 242 in 2013).

According to the *Guardian*, Baier was the seventh person killed by police in the state of Nebraska since the beginning of the year.

On September 6, Omaha police shot and killed 25-year-old David L. Anderson in a South Omaha residential neighborhood after the latter attempted to evade arrest. According to a statement released after the killing, Omaha police officers Michael Jones and Scott Kuzminksi and three other deputies sought to apprehend Anderson, who had a warrant out for his arrest after failing to appear before his probation officer on six different occasions. Anderson had been convicted on drug charges in 2013.

After officers approached Anderson, whose vehicle had been parked in a residential driveway, the latter tried to flee by repeatedly ramming the unmarked police car blocking his escape. Officers Kuzminksi and Jones let loose a volley of gunfire, striking Anderson eight times. Anderson later died from his injuries.

According to Omaha policing regulations, an officer is allowed to fire on a moving vehicle in self-defense or defense of another, but under no circumstance should purposefully seek to place themselves in the path of a vehicle or open fire without similar cause. The Omaha Police Department has presented no evidence showing that any of the officers were in danger of being struck by Anderson's vehicle before deciding to open fire.

Baier and Anderson's deaths at the hands of the police further give the lie to claims presented by the

advocates of racist and identity politics that the rising wave of police brutality in America is a reflection of an unbridgeable racial hatred among whites against African Americans. Both Anderson and Baier were white, as are the police in both incidents.

Police brutality in the United States routinely claims the lives of poor and working people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, with a recent analysis done by the *Guardian* newspaper showing that whites make up nearly half of all those killed by police in recent months.

Earlier this month, Omaha police concluded a three-month multi-agency push entitled “Operation Triple Beam.” According to the *Omaha World-Herald*, the aim of the local, state and federal crackdown was to arrest “fugitives, gang members and violent offenders,” resulting in the apprehension of 268 individuals. According to Mark Martinez, U.S. Marshal for the district of Nebraska, “It goes to the old saying, ‘Two heads are better than one,’ [the operation was able to] locate people and make arrests in a more expedient manner.” Martinez noted that the program was heavily funded by the US Department of Justice.

Omaha, a former industrial manufacturing and meatpacking hub in the central US, has been decimated by the closure of industry in the region. According to the U.S. Census, in the meatpacking industry alone, major factories in the Omaha-Douglas Metropolitan region have closed or been moved to non-urban centers far from the city. According to the Census, as of 2007 the average wage stood at \$13.10 an hour, less than \$3 more than the average wage of \$10.70 in 1947.

Meanwhile, the militarization of local police units continues apace, with the Nebraska Crime Commission, the state’s top law enforcement body, recently announcing its decision to rewrite rules allowing for speeding up the process for military police officers seeking transfer to civilian policing. According to the Associated Press, under the new rules military police officers could bypass nearly half of the nine-month training course given to new recruits.



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