

Video exposes official lies about police killing in Nashville, Tennessee

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Police in Nashville, Tennessee have backed off initial reports that a man had physically “charged” a policeman who had stopped him last Friday, February 10, for running a stop sign. The man, Jocques Scott Clemmons, was later shot and killed by the same police officer.

Clemmons, 31, attempted to flee on foot after being stopped in the Cayce Home public housing area parking lot in East Nashville, but later turned on Officer Josh Lippert, according to police. During a subsequent scuffle police said Clemmons dropped a loaded handgun before retrieving it and again attempted to flee when he was shot three times by Lippert.

While the videos from security cameras appear to indicate a struggle later when Lippert shot Clemmons in the back, the report that the policeman had initially been assaulted when he got out of his car have been shown to be demonstrably false.

Clemmons, who was African American, was shot by Lippert, who is white, twice in the lower back and once in the hip. Police said he was shot just as he was turning in between two cars after struggling with Lippert.

But a local resident told a reporter for the *Tennessean* that she saw that as excessive and unnecessary force. “A person is shot in the back,” Brenda Morrow said. “That means he’s fleeing; he’s no threat.”

Police attempts to explain why the initial police statements suggested that Lippert had been physically attacked when he had not were less than plausible: “When interviewed by detectives on Friday, Lippert did NOT(original emphasis) assert that he was physically contacted by Clemmons just after he got out of the police car. That interview occurred before he had the opportunity to see any video,” police said in a statement.

Most media ran with the initial police report including the *New York Daily News* which carried a story of the shooting that even embellished the phantom contact:

“As Libbert (sic) got out of his cruiser, surveillance video provided by police shows Clemmons tackling the officer to the ground before running off. Libbert (sic) quickly got to his feet and chased after Clemmons.”

The misspelling of the policeman’s name and the fact that he was in an unmarked car not a “cruiser” are examples of sloppy journalism and forgivable. A total distortion of the facts is not.

Although Lippert had received some commendations in the five years he had worked for the Nashville Police Department, he had also received a total of 20 suspensions for improper conduct. Some were minor, such as for failing to attend in-service training, but two involved use of force, Nashville’s the *Tennessean* reported.

“In October 2015 Lippert used physical force to pull a black motorist from the vehicle during a traffic stop, even though the driver said he’d be willing to get out in the presence of a supervisor. Lippert was also reprimanded for having the man’s car towed without giving him a chance to park the car or turn it over to someone else,” as required by department policy, the paper reported.

The Nashville Branch of the NAACP has called for an “immediate and transparent” investigation, while the U.S. Attorney’s office here has said it will “monitor” the Nashville Police Department’s investigation.

This is not an isolated incident but one that occurs in a certain context and “raises serious questions,” ACLU-TN Executive Director Hedy Weinberg said in an ACLU statement.

“The shooting of Jocques Clemmons did not happen

in a vacuum,” Weinberg remarked, “...incidents like these also compel us to take a step back and ask why Mr. Clemmons was stopped in the first place and how officers make decisions about who to stop for minor traffic infractions. Any one discretionary stop risks a tragic ending if there is an escalation of conflict – far too frequently such escalations result in police use of force, and also expose police to unnecessary risk.”

Weinberg could well have been referring to research by a local African American community group, Gideon’s Army. Describing itself as an “Army for Children,” the group produced a report entitled “Driving while Black” which showed African American and low-income Nashville neighborhoods suffering a disproportionate number of traffic stops and searches by a police department that conducts such traffic stops at an overall rate almost 8 times higher than the national average for police departments.

Nashville/Davidson County District Attorney Glenn Funk announced Thursday that for the first time the Tennessee Bureau of Investigations(TBI) would, starting with the Clemmons shooting, investigate all future shooting involving Metro police.

The use of TBI would by state law effectively make the investigation records confidential until TBI officials considered its investigation completed.



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