

Notes on police violence

Dashcam video of Philando Castile shooting released; Seattle police kill pregnant mother of four

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Dashcam video of police killing of Philando Castile released

Officials in Minnesota have released the police car dash-cam video showing the brutal police killing of Philando Castile during a traffic stop in Falcon Heights last July. The video was made public only days after the officer who killed Castile, Jeronimo Yanez, was acquitted on charges of manslaughter.

The police video shows the events that occurred immediately prior to the video shot by Castile's girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds, after the shooting, which was broadcast live on Facebook.

In the dash-cam video, Yanez can be seen approaching the car. He asks Castile for his license and insurance. Castile says calmly, "Sir, I have to tell you, I do have a firearm on me." This is considered safe practice for individuals who have a license to carry a firearm.

The officer replies, "Okay, Don't reach for it then." Both Castile and his girlfriend can be heard saying that he is not reaching for it, as the officer begins to shout before firing wildly into the car seven times.

In addition to Castile and Reynolds, Reynolds' young daughter was also in the car at the time.

Seattle police kill pregnant mother of four

On Sunday, Seattle police officers responded to a burglary report at the house of Charleena Lyles, a pregnant mother of four children with a history of mental illness. The officers ended up shooting her five times, killing her, claiming that she had a knife. Three of her children were in the apartment when she was shot and killed.

Police were dispatched to Lyles' house after she called to report the burglary. The officers were greeted by Lyles at the front door and then led inside. She initially explained that an Xbox video game console had been stolen, and she showed the officers evidence that things had been disturbed on her bed. Suddenly, the situation escalated when the officers saw Lyles clutching a knife.

An audio recording indicates that the two officers yelled for her to "get back, get back, get back!" after which Lyles told them to "get ready." After the officers allegedly saw a knife in Lyles' hand, one told the other to "tase her," but both found that they were not equipped with such devices. Within seconds, at least five shots were fired.

The Seattle Police Department has said that both officers were equipped with "less-lethal force options," but did not indicate whether such options were used before Lyles was fired upon. Both officers have been placed on paid administrative leave.

In an earlier incident on June 5, officers were sent to Lyle's residence after her former boyfriend arrived unannounced at her apartment. The man was gone when officers arrived, but they allegedly found Lyles holding a pair of large scissors which she refused to

drop. She then, reportedly, warned them “Ain’t none of y’all leaving here today!” and began talking about morphing into wolves and how the police were the devil. Sunday’s audio includes a discussion between the two officers about this previous incident.

Police have responded to at least three domestic violence calls there in the last year. The department therefore made a conscious decision to send two officers based on past events. It is reasonable to expect that they would anticipate similar encounters.

Lyles’ family has told media outlets that Charleena struggled with mental illness as well as years of abusive relationships and threats from government agencies to have her children taken away. There have been similar incidents involving people with mental illness being shot by Seattle police, and the department was put under a federal consent decree in 2012.

Monika Williams, Lyles’ sister, said in an interview, “I don’t know if my sister had a knife or not, and even if she did, she was so tiny. There was no reason two trained police officers had to shoot her down.” Speaking generally about her sister, she said that “she had her teeth knocked out, had numerous black eyes; she has permanent scars from being abused, and she begged and begged for help. Then she finally got the help, and then you take her life in front of her children.”

Her father, Charles, also told media that he could not understand why they used lethal force. After listening to the audio several times, he said, “They were talking calm, and all of a sudden, you heard the gunshots. That really messes me up to hear her die.”



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