

# Chicago police officers indicted for covering up murder of Laquan McDonald

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On Tuesday, Cook County special prosecutor Patricia Brown Holmes announced grand jury indictments for three Chicago Police Department (CPD) officers. The officers are being charged with conspiracy, obstruction of justice and official misconduct for their roles in covering up the murder of Laquan McDonald, a coverup carried out in order to protect officer Jason Van Dyke for the unprovoked street execution of the 17-year-old in October of 2014.

The indictment accuses David March, Joseph Walsh and Thomas Gaffney of lying to investigators immediately after and following the shooting of McDonald, withholding or giving misleading information, filing false police reports, failing to interview witnesses and destroying evidence.

The indictment states that in order to prevent investigators from learning about the murder, March, Walsh and Gaffney, working closely with Van Dyke, first invented a narrative out of whole cloth to justify Van Dyke's brutal killing of the youth, who was shot 16 times even though he was attempting to flee and posed no threat to police.

The indictment states that the three officers filed a series of reports alleging that McDonald threatened them with a knife and lunged at Van Dyke, and that even after being shot twice, McDonald supposedly tried to get up and brandish his knife. These absurd claims were completely shattered by the chilling dashcam video that was eventually released, an overlooked piece of evidence whose release CPD, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel and the Democratic Party blocked for 13 months.

The indictment also charges the officers for their subsequent efforts to distort, ignore and falsify evidence that might have challenged their story. In particular, the officers threatened to arrest witnesses

who might have provided a different narrative. Their efforts to erase 86 minutes of video footage from a Burger King security camera are also mentioned in the indictment.

With the charges stemming from the officers' roles in concealing the facts of the shooting, the indictment is being hailed as striking a blow at CPD's "code of silence," that is, the systematic manipulation of police shooting investigations that has resulted in precisely one murder charge against a CPD officer for an on-duty killing in nearly 35 years, that of Laquan McDonald shooter Jason Van Dyke.

Holmes took this up directly at a press conference, saying, "[t]he indictment makes clear that it is unacceptable to obey an unofficial code of silence." She further stated, "[t]he indictment makes clear that these defendants did more than merely obey an unofficial 'code of silence,' rather it alleges that they lied about what occurred to prevent independent criminal investigators from learning the truth."

While it is clear that the cops involved are criminally complicit in Van Dyke's unjustified murder of McDonald, the indictment of these three officers, not to mention the charges against Van Dyke himself, will ultimately do nothing to change the entrenched criminality and violence perpetrated by the Chicago police.

Even if any of them are convicted, which is unlikely, the top officials and politicians who set policy and who defend the police are dead set on giving cops *carte blanche* to terrorize the city's working population in order to defend the wealth and privileges of the financial oligarchy.

More appropriately, the present indictment should itself be understood as a continuation of the conspiracy to cover up the shooting and minimize its

consequences, particularly for Emanuel and the Democratic Party. When McDonald was shot, and for months after, Emanuel was in the midst of a tight reelection race, and desperate to prevent the release of the video, which he knew would severely hurt his chances.

Emanuel and the city council even approved a \$5 million blood money payment to McDonald's family in April of 2015, before the family had even filed a wrongful death lawsuit, and the day after Emanuel won the vote for a second term.

It was only later in 2015 that the existence of the dashcam video was made known by a whistleblower, corroborating suspicions of journalists and investigators that reports connected to the McDonald shooting were inconsistent with the official autopsy and with an anonymous eyewitness account.

There was no push to charge any of the cops involved with murder or anything else. Democratic Cook County State's Attorney Anita Alvarez only announced charges against Van Dyke on the same day that the dashcam footage was released to the public.

Since then, all announcements of police "reforms" have been entirely cosmetic. While Alvarez lost reelection as state's attorney, her replacement, Kim Foxx, has limited herself to pushing for the use of special state prosecutors in cases of police violence. Despite this, she declined to bring charges against CPD officer Robert Rialmo, who killed Quintonio LeGrier and his neighbor, Bettie Jones, after LeGrier's family called 911 seeking help with their son's mental health crisis.

Recently, Emanuel backed away from his previously stated intention that CPD enter into court-ordered oversight. A yearlong Justice Department civil rights investigation into CPD depicted in detail a police department rife with misconduct and violence against civilians, and recommended extensive changes.

While the election of Donald Trump likely played a role in Emanuel's decision, with Trump and attorney general Jeff Sessions opposing these kinds of police consent decrees, it is also a recognition that Chicago's ruling elite will rely on the police more and more directly as a last line of defense to defend their wealth and privileges. Already, Emanuel had faced a backlash from Chicago police, many of whom voted for Trump, and who recently elected a new Fraternal Order of

Police president resolutely opposed to even the mildest of reforms.



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