

Notes on police violence

Killing of fleeing man by Salt Lake City police officers ruled “justified”

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Newly released footage of an August 13 police killing shows that Salt Lake City, Utah police officers killed Patrick Harmon, 50, as he was running away. The bodycam footage was released on October 4, concurrent with a decision by Salt Lake County District Attorney Sim Gill that the shooting was justified and no charge would be brought against the officers.

Harmon, whose last known address was a homeless shelter, was pulled over by Salt Lake City police officer Kris Smith for allegedly riding his bicycle across several lanes of traffic and missing a “required red rear tail light.”

Smith learned that Harmon had an arrest warrant on record, and called for backup. The bodycam footage shows that Harmon, who appeared distraught, was surrounded by three officers as he was being arrested. The three arresting officers are white; Harmon was black.

Before he was handcuffed, Harmon attempted to flee. As Harmon ran away, one officer shouted, “I’ll fucking shoot you!” Officer Clinton Fox then shot Harmon, hitting him three times. Another officer fired his Taser simultaneously.

Harmon, who was handcuffed on the ground and given first aid, was pronounced dead at an area hospital shortly after the shooting.

Fox later claimed that Harmon was armed with a knife after he attempted to flee, although it is difficult to determine from the footage if he was indeed armed. Investigators released a photo of a knife on the ground purportedly wielded by Harmon in his final moments.

However, other claims by the officers have already unraveled. Fox was interviewed by investigators on August 22—over a week after the police killing—and told

them that “Mr. Harmon stopped running, turned and yelled: ‘I’ll fucking stab you,’” as summarized in the report. However, bodycam footage shows that Harmon did not stop running.

Moreover, while Harmon was turning his upper body to look behind him as he fled, he did not stop or reverse direction, nor is there any indication in the video that he was preparing to run toward or attack the officers. Finally, the claim that Harmon yelled that he would stab an officer is entirely contradicted by the video, which clearly indicates that an officer, presumably Fox himself, shouted an obscene threat to shoot Harmon right before the shooting occurred.

The other two officers on the scene, Smith and Scott Robinson, were both interviewed the day after the killing. The DA report did not describe either Smith or Robinson claiming that Harmon had stopped.

The DA report however accepts the officers’ claims that “Mr. Harmon threatened to stab or cut the officers as they tried to arrest him” as good coin, and concludes that Fox’s “use of deadly force was ‘justified’ under Utah State law.”

“Accordingly,” the report continues, “the District Attorney’s Office declines to file criminal charges and prosecute or otherwise pursue matters against Officer Fox.”

Harmon’s family has opposed the police/prosecutor account of his killing. “They just murdered him flat out,” Harmon’s niece Alisha Shaw told the *Guardian*. “They are lying. There is no way they were threatened by anything. He was only trying to get away.”

Adriane Harmon, another niece of Patrick Harmon, said after viewing the bodycam video: “He was scared. All he did was run. It hurts. ... They said ‘I’m going to

kill you' and they shot him three times. He's just moaning on the ground."

Antoinette Harmon, Patrick Harmon's sister, said that she had not seen her brother since the funeral of one of their siblings several years prior, and that he was potentially struggling with mental illness.

She said that the family had grown up in St. Louis, Missouri, and later moved to Utah. She and other family members moved back to St. Louis, but apparently Patrick Harmon remained in Utah. In Utah, she said, the family often experienced racism.

Jacque Pace-Fivas, a family friend, told the press: "Patrick had many wonderful qualities, and he also had his demons. He was a person who was tormented by the constant pull between those two sides. At his core, he was a good man."

Pace-Fivas noted that Harmon had issues with drugs, but was trying to avoid them and get a job helping people who are struggling with drug problems. He had difficulty finding work and housing due to prior convictions.

Demonstrators gathered outside of the Public Safety Building, which serves as police headquarters, Sunday to protest Harmon's death. They chanted "Black Lives Matter," "Fire Officer Fox," and "Shame on Sim Gill," according to local media.

Protest organizer Lex Scott, who is affiliated with Black Lives Matter and a civil rights organization called United Front, called for replacing Gill as DA if he would not hold police accountable.

Even before the DA report concluding that Harmon's killing was "justifiable," Harmon's family had joined protests after driving from St. Louis to pick up his body.

The *Guardian* notes, "Salt Lake City has previously received national praise for its 'de-escalation' training, aimed at encouraging officers to communicate with people and limit confrontation and use of lethal force." Despite the de-escalation program and body cameras, Harmon was still gunned down over an incident that began with him allegedly riding his bicycle dangerously.



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