

Sacramento police shoot and kill unarmed man in his backyard

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Two Sacramento police officers shot and killed 22-year-old Stephon Clark, an unarmed black man, on Sunday evening. Clark, a father of two, was in the driveway of his grandparents' house, where he also lived, when two officers approached from the street with guns drawn and chased him into the backyard.

Body camera footage shows that as they rounded the corner they simultaneously unleashed a barrage of gunfire, firing 20 bullets and killing Clark. Police later claimed that Clark was holding a cell phone in his hand when he was killed, which the officers say they mistook for a gun.

Clark's young sister was inside the house with his grandparents when police unleashed their hail of bullets.

The footage that was released to the media shows that the two police officers did not identify themselves when they started chasing Clark into his backyard. The two officers both shouted "show me your hands" and, in the same breath, "gun" as they opened fire. They then continued to hold Clark's body at gunpoint for six minutes as they waited for backup to arrive. No attempt was made by the officers to administer first aid until additional officers arrived on the scene where they then handcuffed his corpse before performing CPR. Clark was pronounced dead at the scene.

The Sacramento Police Department released the body cam footage as well as infrared video from a helicopter overhead, in an effort to advance the narrative that Clark's murder was justified. Instead, the footage clearly shows that Clark was unarmed at the time of the shooting, that the police made no attempt to identify themselves and allow him to surrender, and that he was not advancing toward them when they shot him.

The helicopter footage begins with the pilot telling the dispatcher, "He just broke a window, he's heading

south." While the video does not show Clark breaking a window the police later claimed they did not start recording until after the window was broken. It then shows Clark climb over the fence into the adjoining yard, his grandparents. The pilot states that he is running, while the footage shows him walking. Clark also does not appear to be holding anything in either hand.

The two officers then appear with guns drawn and chase Clark into the backyard. Clark can be seen in the helicopter footage moving to his left while the officers are leaning around the corner of the house. He was not "advancing" towards them, but rather appears terrified and disoriented by the sudden attack. The first shots hit Clark and he drops to the ground on his stomach, unmoving, as they fire more shots into his body.

After more police arrive one officer tells the other officers on the scene to mute their microphones. Why this was done and what was said is unknown at this time. However, since the police knew at that point that they had killed an unarmed man, it can be reasonably inferred that they wanted to "get their stories straight" and did not want their conspiracy recorded. This was in all likelihood the point at which they created the story that they mistook Clark's cell phone for a gun.

Sacramento police claim that they were responding to a call regarding a suspect breaking into cars. Regardless of whether this is true or not, the footage released clearly shows that lethal force was not justified.

The release of the footage of the killing was part of a new policy passed by the city of Sacramento in the wake of the 2016 police murder of Joseph Mann, an unarmed and mentally ill black man who the Sacramento police first attempted to ram with their car before shooting him 18 times. The new policy mandated the use of body cameras by Sacramento

police and requires that any video footage of police killings be released within 30 days of the incident.

Clark's murder exposes the futility of the various reforms put in place by police departments in the aftermath of mass protests against the police murders of Michael Brown, Freddie Grey, Eric Garner and many others since 2014.

In an attempt to corral public outrage against police killings into support for the Democratic party, Black Lives Matter and other activist groups that operate within the party's orbit began pressuring city leaders to introduce measures supposedly intended to reduce the number of police killings. This typically included mandating the use of body cameras, hiring more minority police officers, and setting up various "accountability" boards made up of city officials to investigate police shootings.

In spite of these "reforms" police killings have continued apace. In 2017 1,147 people were killed by the police, exceeding the number killed in 2016. Stephon Clark was the 263rd person to be killed by police so far this year. Since his murder another 15 individuals have been killed, bringing the total number to 278.

Indeed, these statistics illustrate that police officers across the US have been emboldened by the lack of prosecutions. In most cases, charges are never brought but when they are, such as in the case of Freddie Grey, the officers are frequently acquitted by friendly courts. Only in the most extreme cases, such as the 2015 killing of Walter Scott, who was shot in the back and killed by a police officer in broad daylight, are prosecutions successful. Even then, the officer involved in the shooting pled out to lesser federal charges in exchange for state murder charges being dropped.



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