

# Killing of 45-year-old postal worker by Portland State University police draws protests

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Jason Washington, a 45-year-old postal worker and Navy veteran, was shot and killed by campus police at Portland State University (PSU) early Friday morning. The two responsible campus police officers are now on paid administrative leave as the university and Portland Police Bureau investigate the murder.

Neither the campus nor city police have released details about the events. According to the bystander videos and witness reports, Washington was celebrating the victory of Oregon State University's baseball team in the College World Series with his friends at a bar on the PSU campus on Thursday night.

When a fight broke out outside the bar, after his friends responded to racial slurs by another group, Washington tried to intervene to prevent a major escalation. In the midst of a skirmish, he fell to the ground and his concealed-carry gun fell out of its holster.

Two campus police officers, Shawn McKenzie and James Dewey, reacted to Washington's attempt to retrieve his weapon by rapidly firing at least 10 shots at him while he had his back turned. There was no indication of prior hostility or threats against the police officers, nor aggressive actions by Washington. At 1:30 a.m. Friday, the middle-aged worker lay dead in front of campus bars and residential buildings.

A longtime Portland resident, Washington was a beloved friend, husband, father and grandfather. He had worked for the United States Postal Service for more than 20 years following his service in the United States Navy as a young adult.

More than 100 students, city residents, relatives and friends of Washington attended a demonstration organized by the Portland State University Student

Union (PSUSU) on Sunday evening to protest and mourn his death at the hands of campus police.

"It's sickening seeing this happen," one attendee named Jocelyn told WSWS reporters. "They went and they shot somebody who was not approaching anybody with any harmful intent. They need to stop, de-escalate, they need to question. They should not have gun use as their first option."

Briana, a PSU student who lives in an apartment building on the street corner adjacent to the site of the police killing, addressed the audience during an open speaking session. "I am so sorry that this happened to your family. He did not deserve it, he was a good man," she said directly to Washington's friends and family. "Nothing, literally nothing justifies his death. I'm so tired of coming to these rallies. What will it take for the police to stop killing my people?"

"This story resonates with me so much because my dad is a Navy vet, who is also a weapon carrier who also likes guns. How am I supposed to trust police officers when they killed this man who is just like my dad? How am I supposed to feel safe when a PSU officer easily shot a man in the back who just wanted to help people?"

Washington's killing is a direct result of the militarization of campuses across the country, in which the police serve as a tool to brutally suppress workers and youth without any liability for the crimes they commit.

Shawn McKenzie and James Dewey became the first PSU campus officers to be sworn in and armed with guns in 2016, following the anti-democratic decision by the university's Board of Trustees to establish an armed campus police force under the training of the

Portland Police Bureau.

The Board of Trustees, a state-appointed body comprised mostly of local corporate and political elites, voted to arm campus security in June 2015 against a backdrop of popular opposition to the measure by students and faculty.

Student and faculty protests led by PSUSU attracted as many as 400 students to demonstrations and gathered over 800 signatures on a #DisarmPSU campaign petition. Studies conducted by the Diversity and Multicultural Student Services office in 2014 and the PSU student government in 2015 showed that the majority of students did not support the arming of campus police or didn't know that such developments were underway.

Disregarding the fear of many working class and minority students of facing violence by armed officers, trustees and administrators justified the decision by claiming that campus police would be able to respond with “more sensitivity to PSU’s diverse campus culture” than Portland Police Bureau officers. They also said that campus security would be able to respond to instances of sexual assault and mass shootings more efficiently.

However, the main factor driving their decision was not the safety of students, but the need to keep up with the trend of establishing police departments on college and university campuses in the United States and the need to suppress growing social opposition among students. The installation and militarization of college police departments kicked off after mass student protests in the 1960s and 70s, when the ruling class realized the need to expand the powers of the police onto the campuses.

As of 2012, nearly all public four-year colleges with more than 2,500 students had their own sworn law enforcement agency, with their officers armed with guns, Tasers, pepper spray and batons. More than 70 percent of campus police agencies have the ability to exercise authority off campus.

College campus police have carried out the same violence against youth and working class people as local police departments. The death of Washington follows the murders by campus police of fourth-year student Scout Schultz at Georgia Tech University in 2017, 43-year-old Samuel Dubose at the University of Cincinnati in Ohio in 2015, and 18-year-old college

freshman Gil Collar at the University of South Alabama in 2012.

On average, more than three people are killed every day by police officers in the United States. The wave of killings has continued in the face of popular opposition to police violence. Even in areas like Portland, which are dominated by the Democratic Party and so-called “progressive” officials, police serve as an arm of the ruling class to intimidate and brutalize workers, youth and the poor regardless of race, ethnicity or gender.



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