

As protests continue, Chicago police release footage of Harith Augustus' murder

Our reporters
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On Sunday evening, the Chicago Police Department (CPD) released a clip of about 20 seconds worth of police body camera footage from one of the officers involved in the shooting of 37-year-old Harith “Snoop” Augustus on Saturday, covering the incident from when the police approach him to the moment he is lying on the street after being hit by police bullets.

The footage was released very quickly, against official protocol, as the city attempts to defuse popular anger over the shooting and police aggression towards protesters, both products of the tense state of class relations in the city.

A violent confrontation between protesters and Chicago police carried on for several hours Saturday after Augustus, a local barber, was fatally shot in the back by a police officer in the South Shore neighborhood.

The video that has been released is heavily edited to portray Augustus in the worst light by emphasizing the fact that he is concealing a gun and holster, which is visible briefly as his shirt rises. The footage is both slowed down and zoomed in on Augustus' torso in order to make this point. Despite this, the fact that the whole encounter was as short as it was is an indictment of the CPD and its policy of occupying neighborhoods as a military-style force.

Most notably, the video clip does not contain any audio, which might shed light on why Augustus felt compelled to flee from police as several officers closed in on him, just seconds after he appeared to be showing them his wallet and identification, in addition to his firearm owner's permit. CPD statements and media reports have made much of Augustus' lack of a concealed carry permit, but the incident happened far too fast for this to have made any difference at all in the encounter.

CPD Superintendent Eddie Johnson spoke Sunday on the video release: “In this particular instance after seeing what transpired last night, I have an obligation to this city, to the community and to these police officers to make sure this city is safe and calm.”

The president of the Chicago Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), Kevin Graham, posted a diatribe on the organization's website defending the police murder and blaming the media for stoking workers' anger, saying, “This bias and self-generated hysteria by the media demonstrates a profound indifference to the burden of a police officer being involved in such an incident, even when, as in this case, the shooting is textbook legitimate.” Denouncing the media for “making policing almost impossible in Chicago,” he also urged CPD to “take a stronger stand against the lawless protestors and their false claims.”

In fact, the CPD has a decades-long history of extraordinary violence and corruption. The demagogic statement of the FOP president is aimed at whipping up far-right elements to be mobilized against social opposition.

For the third day in a row on Monday, a group of about 200 protesters gathered in front of Jeffery Plaza to demand the names of the police involved in the killing of Augustus and the subsequent beating and arrest of demonstrators. Around 6:30 p.m. on Monday the protesters marched to the office of Alderman Michelle Harris.

A WSWs reporting team spoke with several residents in the area where the shooting and protests took place. Each commented on the increasingly tense situation in the city.

Jeremiah, a retail worker near Jeffery Plaza, spoke on the injustice of Augustus' murder and the lawlessness of the police.

“You can tell on the video he was showing them his card. He didn’t take it out, but that doesn’t mean they should have killed him. But they do it, then they get away with it. And the one that shot him is on desk duty or something! They [the police] have power and they don’t care about treating anyone as citizens, as equals. If you don’t have money and power you get long sentences, but people that do, beat the system easily.”

Carol, 55, is a grandmother and caretaker for her elderly mother. On the police presence in the neighborhood she said, “It’s relentless. People walking here have a right to that. They should not be fearing for their lives. There should be respect. It makes no sense. I don’t want to take the kids outside, because I’m afraid I’m going to lose them. I applied for a CC [concealed carry] license. I feel like it’s you or them, and it shouldn’t have to come to that.”

Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel has kept a deliberately low profile during the latest incident, issuing a mild statement saying that the shooting was “understandably emotional for everyone involved.” A long-time figure in the Democratic Party leadership nationally, Emanuel’s administration was hurled into a political crisis after it emerged that he had covered up the existence of the Laquan McDonald shooting video and had arranged for the city to pay a \$5 million hush money payment to McDonald’s family. Next year’s mayoral election has centered heavily on questions relating to policing and several of Emanuel’s opponents are drawn from police and law enforcement leadership.

Emanuel’s statement went on to “commend Superintendent Johnson for his leadership” and promised that “the Civilian Office of Police Accountability is conducting a full and thorough investigation.” The Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA) was created in September 2017 by Emanuel and the city council to replace the previous so-called police oversight agency, the Independent Police Review Authority (IPRA), which had been discredited by its total failure to hold police responsible for murder or excessive force.

COPA, like IPRA when it was established, is merely another agency intended to provide cover for the police. Even after COPA’s recent finding that CPD officer Robert Rialmo should be fired for the killing of Quintonio LeGrier, there is no guarantee that will

happen, as the final decision is made by Emanuel’s hand-picked, eight-member police board.

Former police superintendent Garry McCarthy, who was fired by Emanuel following the McDonald shooting and is running a law-and-order campaign against Emanuel in next year’s mayoral election, offered a defense of CPD’s actions in gunning down Augustus, saying “At first blush, this shooting appears to be justified, based on what we see in that video and I’m pleased with its quick release.” Adding, “But let us also be clear, that the shooting victim refused to comply with the officers. He appears to reach for a gun. At that point, he leaves the officers with little to no choice but to shoot in defense of their own lives.”

Mayoral challenger and former Emanuel appointee to the Chicago Police Board for accountability, Lori Lightfoot, neglected to specifically mention the murder of Augustus and instead encouraged COPA to “move forward swiftly, independently and thoroughly.”



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