

Minneapolis police officer sentenced to over 12 years in prison for murder of Justine Damond

Anthony Bertolt
13 June 2019

Last Friday, former Minneapolis, Minnesota police officer Mohamed Noor was sentenced to 12.5 years in prison for the murder of 40-year-old Australian-American Justine Damond after a rare guilty verdict in a case where a police officer killed a civilian. Shortly after Noor was found guilty, Damond's family won a settlement with the city of Minneapolis for \$20 million.

A month-long trial in April resulted in Noor being found guilty of third-degree murder and involuntary manslaughter and not guilty of second-degree murder. The outcome of Noor's trial was the first time a police officer was convicted for killing a civilian on-duty in Minnesota and his trial was only the second time a police officer was tried for killing a person on duty in the state's history.

Noor fatally shot Damond on the night of July 15, 2017 while responding to a 911 call about a possible sexual assault. Noor and his partner at the time, Matthew Harrity, drove through the alley with both their squad car lights and body cameras turned off. Both officers say they heard a loud noise, which prompted them to draw their weapons. Sitting in the passenger seat, Noor quickly opened fired at Damond who was approaching the driver side of the vehicle, hitting her and killing her.

Following the murder, Minneapolis police dragged their feet on cooperating with an investigation by the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) and remained almost completely silent until a year after the incident when Hennepin County Attorney Mike Freeman announced charges against Noor.

Noor's trial sparked a storm of criticism from sections of liberal commentators and prominent proponents of identity politics claiming that charges

had only been brought since Noor, a black Somali-American immigrant, had shot and killed a white Australian woman.

Mel Reeves, a local activist who publishes Fight the Power Journal (FTPJ), told the *Star Tribune*, "the system has an easier time convicting a black man in a blue uniform," while adding that he agreed with the verdict. However, in an article on FTPJ following Noor's conviction last month, Reeves attempted to paint the verdict as the result of racism in the court system. He asked, "If race is not a factor (as Freeman claims) then how does one explain the failure of the judicial system in practically every locale in the US to charge White cops (or Black cops) for killing Black people?" He then follows up by claiming "Race is ALWAYS a factor in a racist society!"

Nekima Levy Armstrong, a leading figure in the Minneapolis Black Lives Matter and president of Minneapolis NAACP wrote in a Facebook post, "This is unprecedented, just like every other aspect of this case, and I would posit once again that the only reason this is happening is because the officer in question was Black, Muslim, and a Somali immigrant, and the victim was an affluent white woman."

The comments from Reeves and Levy Armstrong ignore and cover up recent guilty verdicts and sentencing of other white officers who killed black victims in an attempt frame the trial, conviction and sentencing of killer cops as the result of racism. With this outlook, what would be the explanation of the conviction of Jason Van Dyke, the white officer who murdered Laquan McDonald in Chicago, sentenced to nearly 7 years, and Michael Slager, the white cop in South Carolina who received 20 years in prison after

murdering Walter Scott?

The elevation of race as the main issue with police violence in America leaves out the fact that police officers are rarely ever charged for killing civilians regardless of the skin color of the officer or victim.

What the cases of Noor, Van Dyke and Slager share is that the circumstances around the shooting prevented the police from justifying their actions and acquitting the officers. In each case, the officers used the same tried and true defense argument, that they feared for their life, but overwhelming evidence refuted these claims entirely.

Far from being an “an isolated case with an isolated result based on racial dynamics and affluence of the victim, not to mention the race of the officer” as Levy Armstrong claimed following Noor’s trial, the events following Damond’s killing followed a common template—the police searched her home, looking for a justification for her murder, while the department refused to cooperate with investigators, working to prevent the release of any information that would further incriminate Noor.

Noor’s case is rare because police in the United States are rarely ever charged or convicted in cases where they have killed a civilian. In 12,000 cases of police killings from 2005 to 2017, only 80 were charged, and 30 were found guilty.

Moreover, what Reeves and Levy Armstrong fail to address is the social function of the police in capitalist society. While racism is encouraged by the ruling class, and racism does play a role in police killings, police function mainly as an occupying military force, treating the working class as a hostile force regardless of ethnicity or national origin. Because of this, the police are encouraged to kill with almost complete legal impunity. The fact is that the main target of police violence is the working class and poor, from whom the ruling class is fearful of any organized opposition to historic levels of social inequality and constant attacks on democratic rights.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact