Outrage as Colorado police returned to duty after shooting 19-year-old in the back

Kayla Costa
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On Thursday, the Colorado Springs Police Department released bodycam video footage of the police murder of 19-year-old De'Von Bailey. By Friday, a police department spokesperson announced that the two officers responsible for his death will return to active duty, indicating that it is unlikely that any charges will be brought.

Bailey was shot to death on August 3. He was the 537th person to be killed by police in the US in 2019, according to records collected by the *Washington Post.* Thirty-three more people have been killed by cops in the two weeks since his death, bringing the total up to 570.

According to initial police reports, Sgt. Alan Van't Land and Officer Blake Evenson responded to a report of an armed personal robbery on East Fountain Boulevard in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The officers identified Bailey and his cousin as suspects, based on the robbery victim's general description of two black men in their late teens who were wearing shorts.

After officers interviewed the two boys, the first press release from the El Paso County Sheriff's Office stated, "During the encounter, one suspect reached for a firearm. At least one officer fired a shot at the suspect." Bailey died of gunshot injuries at a local hospital.

The material released Thursday includes the initial dispatch and the bodycam footage of both officers, which expose the official narrative.

In the video, Bailey and his cousin appear terrified upon being approached by the officers in the middle of a residential street. They repeatedly answer the officers' questions about their identity, indicating that they do not go by the names of the reported suspects. Bailey appears to place something small in his pocket, before both teens follow commands to put their hands up.

Van't Land explains that they will be searched for weapons, and the other officer approaches Bailey from the back. When Bailey sprints down the street, the officers yell, "Keep your hands up!" He continues to run but does not give any indication of reaching for a gun or threatening officers. Sgt. Van't Land then fires eight shots, four of which hit Bailey in the back and elbow, after which he falls to the ground face down.

While the wounds are gushing with blood onto the pavement and he moans in pain, they pull his arms behind his back and search for a gun. After feeling an object in his pants, they cut his shorts off with a blade and retrieve it. It is unclear whether the object was in fact a gun.

The footage ends before Bailey receives any medical attention. He was reportedly transferred to a local hospital, where he died within hours from his wounds.

Both officers were placed on standard administrative leave while the county sheriff's department carried out an investigation, but those findings were turned over to the District Attorney's office on Thursday. Though the investigation findings are now under review by the DA office for "several months," it is highly unlikely that the officers will be charged, especially now that they have returned to active duty. The county sheriff and local police department continue to reiterate that the officers felt threatened, based on their claims that Bailey was reaching for a weapon as he ran away.

Bailey's family is demanding an independent investigation into the circumstances of the shooting. They are arguing that the police department, sheriff's office and district attorney's office are "friends" and therefore cannot carry out an objective investigation.

Their attorney, Darold Killmer, spoke to reporters on Thursday after the footage was released. "The police appear to argue that they shot Mr. Bailey because they

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feared he was going for a gun at the time. We think the video shows otherwise." Killmer continued, "Mr. Bailey was trying desperately to flee from the police, and he did not have a weapon in his hand. And had not shown any weapon when he was shot in the back and killed."

So far, two protests have taken place in Colorado Springs to express widespread opposition to police violence, and it is likely that more will break out this weekend.

The first took place on August 5, two days after the shooting, when dozens of people marched from Colorado Springs City Hall to the Police Operations Center. They were confronted by 17 police officers in riot gear, along with two right-wing white men who pulled guns on the protestors after pulling up on motorcycles.

The second protest took place this Tuesday, August 13, attended by hundreds of people outside the city's police headquarters as the family raised their demands for an independent investigation. Again, a right-wing provocateur attempted to disrupt the protest, shouting from his motorcycle to drown out De'Von's father as he spoke to the crowd.

August 9 marked the fifth anniversary of the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. Over the past five years, more than 5,000 people of all races have been killed by police. The mass anger over police violence that erupted after the killing of Brown and other high-profile police murders was channeled behind the Democratic Party through the promotion of identity politics.

In the case of Bailey, the police officers are white and the victim black. However, the unending reign of police violence in America cannot be explained on the basis of racism, whatever role this may play.

Despite the disproportionate killing of Native Americans and African-Americans, whites comprise the largest number of those killed by police. In Colorado Springs, for example, Bailey was the fifth person to be shot and killed by local police this year. The four others were white.

In the period following the killing of Brown, the Obama administration worked to cover for police violence through a series of meaningless reforms, while continuing the channel weapons of war from the Pentagon to local police departments. The administration routinely rejected calls for cops to be prosecuted and opposed all attempts to bring police violence cases before the Supreme Court.

After coming to office, the Trump administration openly encouraged police to "get tough," providing police violence with the explicit sanction of the White House. This has coincided with the administration's vicious persecution of immigrants and his encouragement of right-wing and fascistic organizations and individuals.

Significantly, the police killing of De'von Bailey on August 3 took place on the same day as the massacre by a right-wing fascist in El Paso, Texas.

The horrific killing of Bailey is only the latest outrage. Under conditions of growing social inequality and increasing social and political opposition, the ruling elite is turning ever more openly to authoritarian forms of rule. The arming of the police with a license to kill is a component part of this apparatus of repression.

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