Protests continue in Los Angeles after police kill unarmed 29-year-old man

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Protests continued in Los Angeles for a third day in a row Wednesday over the killing of 29-year-old Dijon Kizzee.

On Monday, deputies with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's department stopped Kizzee, an African-American man, over an alleged vehicle code violation while riding a bicycle. According to police accounts, Kizzee then fled on foot with a jacket in his arms. Kizzee dropped the jacket during the pursuit, with deputies alleging that it contained a hidden firearm prompting them to fire at Kizzee and kill him.

The lawyer representing Kizzee's family alleges that he was shot more than 20 times in the back while the sheriff's department alleges fewer than 20 shots were fired.

The sheriff's department also alleges that the young man punched one of the deputies during the course of the pursuit, however, they also claim that neither of the two officers suffered any injuries as a result of the incident. The department claims that Kizzee tried to reach for the gun before being shot, however, no evidence has been provided to substantiate the claim either. Neither deputy has been named by the department thus far with both put on leave.

Several witnesses to the incident interviewed by the *Los Angeles Times* indicated they did not see any sign of a threat from Kizzee towards the officers. Latiera Kirby, who had stopped by her mother's house, was sitting in her car when Kizzee ran by pleading for help. "He said, 'They're coming to get me, they're coming to get me,'" Kirby noted. Kizzee then offered Kirby money to drive him away. Kirby refused him, not knowing who he was and why he was running, and related that she then saw the deputies pursuing Kizzee and shooting him after he fell to the ground. "He had nothing in his hands," Kirby said.

The shooting horrified nearby residents who, by all indications, witnessed the summary execution of an innocent man by Los Angeles police officers. Neighbors cried out that he did not need to be shot. "You don't have to shoot him that many times! You could have tased him," they said.

Another community resident who witnessed the shooting, 52-year-old Alida Trejo, says she heard between 8 and 11 shots fired after witnessing Kizzee run past her home. She saw a deputy struggling to arrest Kizzee while neighbors were telling him not to resist and for the deputy not to shoot. According to Trejo however, "They say the man punched the deputy, but I never saw that happen."

The sheriff's department has claimed that they do not know what specific violation the young man committed while riding his bicycle or why officers would engage him in a foot chase and then shoot him over such a minor infraction.

It is likely that Kizzee was in fact the subject of what is known as a pretextual traffic stop. Having no probable cause for arrest, police will follow a subject driving a car, pedaling a bicycle, or otherwise operating a vehicle until the suspect commits a traffic violation. At that point, the minor infraction can be used as a pretext for more invasive searching and interrogation.

The killing of Kizzee, coming on the heels of the shooting of Jakob Blake in Kenosha, Wisconsin, George Floyd in Minnesota, and numerous others, has prompted continuous protests throughout the past three days including outside the Los Angeles County Sheriff's station. Sheriff Alex Villanueva used the occasion of the protests to claim sympathy with Kizzee's family while absurdly drawing moral equivalence between random street violence and targeted killings by police officers noting that protests

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seem to care about the latter case only.

The Los Angeles Sheriff's Department is also under fire for the June killing of 18-year-old Andres Guardado in the West Compton area. Guardado worked as a security guard at an auto body shop. The sheriff's department alleges the young man pulled a gun on officers after they had been "observing" him. Like the killing of Kizzee, no police calls had been made in relation to the incident with the police shooting Guardado in the back five times. The incident sparked protests numbering in the thousands prompting the Sheriff's department to destroy footage of in the incident kept by a local store owner.

A whistleblower has since given sworn testimony that Guardado was murdered as part of an initiation into a violent police gang known as the "Executioners." The whistleblower, Los Angeles County Sheriff's deputy Austreberto Gonzalez, testified that "Members become inked as 'Executioners' after executing members of the public, or otherwise commit acts of violence in furtherance of the gang." The "inking" Gonzalez referred to are tattoos Executioners members wear including AK-47s and Nazi imagery. Gonzalez testified that the gangs oftentimes throw "998 parties" named after the police code for an officer-involved shooting after a deputy shoots someone.

Gonzalez's lawyer, Alan Romero, told the *Los Angeles Times*, "We have a gang here that has grown to the point where it dominates every aspect of life at the Compton station. It essentially controls scheduling, the distribution of informant tips, and assignments to deputies in the station with preference to members of the gang as well as prospects."

County Sheriff Villanueva later said, "There is no gang of any deputies running any station." Referring to Gonzalez's testimony, Villanueva remarked, "I take these allegations very seriously and recently enacted a policy specifically addressing illicit groups, deputy cliques and subgroups." Inspector General Max Huntsman, however, remarked that he was "aware of no implementation whatsoever" of any such policies.

Researchers have uncovered the existence of multiple gangs among Los Angeles law enforcement, some going back as far back as 1971. These include the "Banditos" patrolling East LA, the "Lynwood Vikings" and the "3000 boys" based out of the Men's Central Jail who would earn their tattoos each time they broke an inmate's bones.

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