

Protests erupt in Waukegan, Illinois after fatal police shooting of teenager

Brian Green
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Workers and youth in Waukegan, Illinois protested Friday to call for justice and demand answers in Tuesday's police killing of 19-year-old Marcellis Stinnette and wounding of his girlfriend Tafarra Williams.

Stinnette and Williams, who are both black, were shot by a still unidentified Waukegan police officer, who is Hispanic and a five-year veteran of the Waukegan Police Department (WPD). Stinnette died at the scene of the police shooting. Williams, who was the driver of the car that Stinnette rode in, was hospitalized after the shooting and is recovering from severe injuries.

According to ABC News, Williams asked from her hospital bed, "Why did you shoot? I didn't do nothing wrong. I have a license. You didn't tell me I was under arrest. Why did you just flame up my car like that? Why did you shoot?"

The police report claims the WPD Patrol Division were investigating a suspicious vehicle occupied by two people when they fled. The report goes on to claim that moments later another police officer spotted the vehicle in the area of Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue and South Avenue. While the police officer was out of his car, the vehicle allegedly began to reverse. The police officer then claims to have fired his semi-automatic pistol at the car in response.

The official police account must be viewed with the utmost skepticism. Not only does the report contradict the testimony of Williams and eyewitnesses, but police across the United States routinely cover up and fabricate evidence about police shootings. Williams stated that she posed no danger to the officer. She told her mother, "Mama, they just shot us for nothing." According to Williams' mother, she handed over her license and followed the directions of the police officers.

Eyewitness testimony of Darrell Mosier substantiates William's claims. Mosier noted, "He just said 'Stop!' and started shooting." He added that after the officer shot into the car, it began to spin and reverse. Mosier told ABC, "The police officer got out of the car. When he told them to stop, he told her to stop, she was scared. She put her up hands, she started yelling, 'Why you got a gun?' She started screaming. He just started shooting."

There are still many unanswered questions as to why and how the shooting took place. Did Stinnette and Williams' vehicle in fact match the description of the "fleeing" suspects? What was the reason for the initiating stop in the first place? Was the officer really in harm's way of the "reversing" vehicle as the report claims?

The investigation has been handed over to Illinois State Police, which will conduct a so-called "independent investigation" into the shooting. Then the evidence will be given over to Michael Nerheim, the Lake County state's attorney, to decide if charges should be pursued. The evidence most critical to finding out what happened is the video footage taken by officer body and dash cams.

Nerheim said in a press statement, "Should it be determined the officers violated a law, they will be criminally charged. If laws were not broken, I will write up a detailed statement that will completely review the facts, show the evidence, explain applicable laws, and give our reasoning for the final decision."

This is the language of a whitewash in action. Nerheim seeks to follow in the footsteps of Republican Kentucky Attorney General Daniel Cameron, who did not allow a grand jury to consider whether homicide charges could and should be brought against any of the police responsible for killing Breonna Taylor.

The US legal system is designed to shield police from prosecution, as exemplified by the cases of Breonna Taylor, Jacob Blake, George Floyd and many more.

Moreover, this latest episode of police violence cannot be isolated from the unending reign of police violence in the United States. This killing happened just 17 miles south of Kenosha, Wisconsin, where Jacob Blake, a 29-year-old black man, was brutally shot in the back seven times and paralyzed in August.

While black workers and youth are disproportionately the victims of police violence and murder, and racism is certainly an element among the police forces, police violence is not rooted in “white racism” as is widely claimed by affluent layers of the middle class and the bourgeois press. Indeed, more whites are killed by police than blacks or other minorities and are subject to the same brutality and violence.

Most recently, 25-year-old white convenience store worker Hannah Fizer of Sedalia, Missouri was murdered by a sheriff’s deputy while on her way to work. And 13-year-old Linden Cameron remains in serious condition at the Primary Children’s Hospital in Salt Lake City, Utah after a police officer with the Salt Lake City Police Department shot him multiple times while he was running away.

The main factor in police violence is not race but class. Around 1,000 people are killed by police every year in the United States. What they all share in common is they are part of the poorest and most exploited layers of the working class, white, black or immigrant.

As the protests against police violence in Nigeria show, the police are an arm of the capitalist state across the world. They are the “special bodies of armed men,” as Engels noted on the nature of the capitalist state, tasked with protecting the property, wealth, and power of the ruling class from the working class.

The protests from Waukegan, Illinois to Nigeria against police violence are part of the international upsurge of the working class against the daily violence of the capitalist system.



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