

Leading NYPD officer caught posting racist, fascist messages online

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Deputy Inspector James F. Kobel, a 28-year veteran of the New York City Police Department (NYPD) was revealed to have been a far-right “troll” on an online forum called Law Enforcement Rant, or the Rant. A report by the New York City Council published Nov. 6 details that he had posted over 500 times in this forum, leaving a trail of racist remarks and personal information about his co-workers.

Within the force, Kobel holds the rank of captain and was a commanding officer of the Equal Employment Opportunity Division, which is responsible for investigating employment and harassment claims.

Going by the username of “Clouseau,” Kobel wrote hundreds of vile posts on the Rant, using slurs and profanity directed against African Americans, Jews, Muslims and others. A representative example is him saying that Eric Garner, an African American man who was placed in a lethal chokehold by police for selling cigarettes on the sidewalk, died because of his “poor dietary choices” and that Garner “should have made an effort to make himself a productive member of society ... [instead of] having everyone of his spawn living off of the Federal Government Teet.”

The investigators were able to cross-reference personal information that “Clouseau” had posted about himself on the forum, including the dates he joined the NYPD, proposed to his wife and his mother died, which matched the identity of Kobel. More evidence, including a picture of the digital avatar used by “Clouseau” on Kobel’s phone and an email on his personal computer from the Rant message board that acknowledged his screen name, substantiated the investigators’ conclusion.

In his posts, Kobel attacked black Democratic politicians, hurling a variety of racist epithets against former President Barack Obama, Representative Ilhan

Omar and even Mayor Bill de Blasio’s biracial son. Kobel has also parroted the xenophobic rhetoric of the Trump administration, calling COVID-19 the “Wuhan flu.” His other posts contain mixtures of homophobia, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.

Kobel’s views represent the general consensus opinion of posters in the Rant, a forum dedicated to active and retired police officers. Several of the current threads on the site promotes the conspiracy theory that President Donald Trump was the victim of election fraud and that the victory of President-elect Joseph Biden is illegitimate. Kobel’s views are also common within the NYPD.

The Police Benevolent Association and the Sergeants Benevolent Association, which represent between them almost all of the police officers in New York City, both endorsed Trump’s reelection campaign. Trump has repeatedly encouraged police violence, saying in relation to this summer’s protests after the police murder of George Floyd, “When the looting starts, the shooting starts.”

Data recently published by the New York Civil Liberties Union reveal that the head of the NYPD, Police Commissioner Dermot Shea, alongside other top NYPD brass have been guilty of abuse of authority, with Shea being caught conducting an unlawful stop and frisk. The data reveal over 323,911 accusations of police misconduct, composed of beatings, chokes, shootings, racist language and more, with complaints spiking over the past four years.

Commissioner Shea cynically responded to the report on Kobel, saying, “The allegations, if true, that it can be attributed and proved to a member of this department, I am saddened and I am disgusted by it.” Kobel has continued to deny his online identity, suggesting that he was framed. This unsubstantiated

claim has been backed by the Captains Endowment Association, which represents Kobel.

The investigation against Kobel was conducted by the City Council's Oversight and Investigations Division, led by Democratic Councilman Ritchie Torres, who said: "The NYPD knew of the existence of Law Enforcement Rant and it did nothing to uncover the identities of those officers. It speaks to the complacency and casual bigotry of the old boys network at the NYPD. The most hateful person was put in charge of fighting hate in the police department. That's a profound failure of due diligence on the part of NYPD leadership."

Kobel's position within the police force was not a "profound failure of the NYPD," but bound up with the role of police and their fostering of fascistic tendencies on a global basis. In a 2019 report, the Plain View Project documented 5,000 bigoted social media posts by 3,500 accounts identified as belonging to current and former law enforcement officials just in the US, representing a tip of the iceberg.

The Brennan Center for Justice released a report in late August detailing the interconnection between the police and far-right forces. It notes that the police response to the nationwide protests against police brutality this summer included numerous officers flaunting their affiliation with far-right groups.

A veteran sheriff's deputy was photographed wearing patches with logos of the Three Percenters and Oath Keepers militias, with similar images of officers appearing in cities throughout the country. Furthermore, our own investigation has revealed connections between police forces and far-right coup plotters who had attempted to kidnap and murder Gretchen Whitmer, the Democratic governor of Michigan.

All sections of the US ruling class, both Democratic and Republican, have emboldened the most backward layers of the police. The Obama administration was responsible for unprecedented police militarization, equipping local police forces with billions of dollars worth of military equipment. During this summer's protests, Democratic mayors and governors called in the National Guard and oversaw brutal police crackdowns involving mass arrests and military-grade vehicles and equipment. In New York, after dozens of protesters were brutalized by the police, de Blasio said

that the police gave "fair treatment across the board."



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