

Los Angeles Police Department officers and employees caught circulating Valentine's Day image of George Floyd captioned "You take my breath away"

Shawn Velia, John Andrews
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The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) has been forced to open an internal investigation after several sworn officers and civilian employees reportedly shared a Valentine's Day-themed image of George Floyd with a caption that read, "You take my breath away."

Floyd died after three Minneapolis Police Department officers, Derek Chauvin, Thomas Lane, and J. Alexander Kueng, pinned him to the asphalt for more than nine minutes on May 25, 2020, while a fourth officer, Tou Thao, stood by, lecturing the horrified spectators.

Shocking cell phone video images of Chauvin callously kneeling on Floyd's neck after he complained that he could not breathe, and videos that captured the life being squeezed out of Floyd while he pleaded for his mother, triggered massive protests throughout the United States and around the world. Hundreds of thousands of demonstrators drawn from all ages and ethnicities poured into the streets to protest police abuse, many holding likenesses of Floyd and others, such as Eric Garner, whose last words included "I can't breathe."

The Hennepin County Medical Examiner attributed Floyd's death to "cardiopulmonary arrest complicating law enforcement subdual restraint, and neck compression." The family's private autopsy used more straightforward language: "homicide caused by asphyxia due to neck and back compression that led to a lack of blood flow to the brain."

"Positional," "compression" or "restraint asphyxia" is well documented by forensic pathologists as a

mechanism of police in-custody deaths. Typically, the victim is in an agitated state due to mental illness, drug intoxication, or a combination of the two. The physiological processes in play require deep breathing to counter, but instead police officers use their body weight to hold the person down in a prone restraint that impairs breathing, causing the victim to struggle reflexively while struggling to breathe, which in turn causes the officers to continue the restraint until the lack of oxygenated blood causes death.

The risk of such outcomes can be reduced simply by rolling people onto their sides, or sitting them up, after handcuffing, in other words putting them into a "recovery position."

The frequency of such deaths is not known because no national database tracks them. Local agencies typically dispute that their officers' aggressive restraints play any role, claiming that victims pass away from drug overdoses or so-called "excited delirium" at the exact moment the officers are holding them chest down.

The LAPD issued several statements via Twitter confirming that a police officer had filed a personnel complaint regarding the Valentine's Day image making fun of the Minneapolis officers' asphyxiation of George Floyd.

According to one tweet, "At this point the Department has not identified any actual postings in the workplace or identified that it was in fact our department employee who created the image. We have raised the apparent existence of the image and directed commands to survey the worksites for it."

A subsequent tweet added, “If found any employee or supervisor is directed to take possession and identify those present. The Department will have zero tolerance for this type of behavior.”

LAPD Chief Michel Moore told the *Los Angeles Times*, “Our investigation is to determine the accuracy of the allegations while also reinforcing our zero tolerance for anything with racist views.”

Moore indicated that investigators will attempt to determine how the image may have come into the possession of the department’s employees, and who may have been involved. He added that if the allegations were corroborated, “people will find [his] wrath.”

Los Angeles District Attorney George Gascón, recently elected on a platform of criminal justice and police reform, announced via Twitter that his office “will be looking into this matter to determine if the integrity of any of [its] cases may have been compromised by biased police work.”

Regardless of the image’s origin, there is no question that it was shared among many LAPD employees until one reported it in a personnel complaint.

Similar allegations of LAPD officers belittling police violence and extolling racism extend back decades. For example, at the time of the Rodney King beating, which occurred exactly thirty years and two weeks ago, LAPD mobile computer terminal messages comparing stakeouts in black neighborhoods with watching the film “Gorillas In the Mist” surfaced.

While it is unclear what Moore’s “wrath” will entail should the allegations be verified, it is highly likely that any action undertaken will be minimal.

Local police departments such as the LAPD are the “special bodies of armed men” described by Frederick Engels as essential to the maintenance of capitalist property relations by the state. They attract and cultivate a certain depraved social type. As a result, images, comments, and posts similar to the LAPD George Floyd valentine are routinely shared within law enforcement agencies throughout the United States.

The Plain View Project has created a database containing more than 5,000 Facebook posts and comments from police officers from various jurisdictions, including Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Dallas, Texas; St. Louis, Missouri; Phoenix, Arizona; York, Pennsylvania; Twin Falls, Idaho; Denison,

Texas; and Lake County, Florida.

One post included a meme shared by a Dallas police officer in December 2017 that read, “The idea that society oppresses (sic) women is laughable.”

Another post from a Philadelphia police officer in March 2016 included a video of a vehicle being driven through a group of protesters that were protesting a Trump rally. The officer’s caption read, “Trump, trump, trump!!! I can’t wait until someone has had enough, and just plows through these idiots!”

A different Philadelphia police officer shared a post in January 2012 that included a CNN article referencing a plea deal that was struck for a US Marine squad leader that was charged in connection with the Haditha Massacre, which resulted in the deaths of 24 people. The plea deal guaranteed that the Marine would not serve any prison time, which triggered outrage among Iraqis.

The police officer included a statement that read, “Who gives a flying F*** if the iraqi’s (sic) are pissed. F*** them and their country. They should take all the iraqi’s (sic) that were at the court hearing and piss on them outside the court room and broadcast it nationally (sic) and tell the rest of the world who is mad also to go F*** them selves (sic).”

These are just a few examples of the mentality and opinions that are widely held and cultivated among police officers throughout the United States.



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