

Off-duty Chicago police officer charged with shooting at two people sitting in their car

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Chicago police officer Kevin Bunge was charged this week with shooting two innocent bystanders while off-duty last December. The entire incident, in which two innocent men were fired upon after posing not the slightest threat, is part of the continuous wave of violence that is endemic to the Chicago Police Department (CPD) and police agencies across the United States.

Bunge has eight years as a Chicago police officer, and also teaches use of force at the Chicago police academy. That an officer who teaches use of force is being accused of excessive force speaks directly to the nature of the police.

CPD bodycam footage released in December revealed the brutal and illegal night-time police raid on the home of social worker Anjanette Young in February 2019. In January, footage was released showing 32-year-old Martina Standley on November 14, 2019, as she lay bleeding and unconscious for over eight minutes with her leg crushed and trapped under a Chicago police's SUV tire after being run over.

According to prosecutor Mary McDonnell, Bunge was sitting in his car after coming home from completing his shift as an instructor at the police academy. While he sat, a red car with two men parked behind him. Some minutes later, Bunge got out of his car, walked towards the red car and fired two shots at the men. A bullet hit the hand of Jomner Orozco Carreto, one of the two men in the car, while the other man, Carlos Ramírez, was injured by pieces of glass that shattered from the bullet.

For his defense, Bunge is relying on the most used excuse for excessive force by police. In this case, Bunge told police he heard gunshots, saw a person get into the red car parked behind him and when he approached the car someone pointed a gun at him.

Bunge's defense attorney Tim Grace said Bunge, a former Marine, was sitting in his car before the shooting listening to an audiobook about the battle of Fallujah. No doubt Bunge found some inspiration listening to an audiobook about a horrific US war crime before meting out his own personal violence.

Grace alleges that Bunge, who had previously been carjacked, was paranoid about being carjacked again after a recent wave of carjackings in Chicago in December. Grace commented, "He noticed the vehicle behind him, and the thoughts that were going through his mind were, 'Why is the victim parked so close to me? What are they doing?'"

Perhaps revealing more than intended, Grace claimed Bunge was simply "acting like a police officer," that is, he was acting like the many before him who are part of a force which kills over a thousand people every year with near impunity, when he fired at the two men.

While no weapon was ever found on the victims or in their car, Grace alleges the victims had "an opportunity to dispose of the weapon" after the shooting.

Ramirez, one of the victims, said he was using his GPS to help Orozco, who was driving, get to their destination. Orozco thought the GPS was giving them the wrong directions, so he pulled over to check it and parked behind Bunge's car. Some moments later, Bunge appeared standing in front of their car and opened fire.

Video footage released by the Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA) confirms this. The footage shows only Ramirez and Orozco parking behind Bunge's car. It does not, as Bunge alleged, show anyone walking outside or getting into their car. It does, however, show Bunge firing upon the two men and Orozco driving away backwards in attempt to avoid the bullets.

Bunge is charged with aggravated battery with a firearm and aggravated discharge of a firearm and has been stripped of police powers.

Represented by the People's Law Office, the victims filed a lawsuit which states Bunge, "without cause or justification, discharged his firearm at" the victims in violation of their "constitutional right to be free from excessive force and unlawful seizures guaranteed by the Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution."

The lawsuit also accuses Bunge of making false statements in police reports to "cover up his wrongdoing." Moreover, it says, "Adding insult to injury, Chicago police officers placed both men under arrest, despite the fact that they were victims of this unprovoked shooting."

In a press release from the law office, Orozco said, "I hope no one else ever has to experience what happened to us. The police department needs to control its officers. This should never have happened, and we will fight for justice." Ramirez said of Bunge, "He should be fired. He is too dangerous to be a law enforcement officer. I thought we were going to die. I don't want this to ever happen to anyone else. That really helps me fight for justice."

As of Wednesday, Bunge was out of jail after paying a \$1,000 bond as he awaits trial. A judge will determine later this month if Bunge must surrender all of his firearms.

There is a logic to Bunge's assault, one which spurs continuous brutalization of the American working class. One might conclude that Bunge was acting overly paranoid. Perhaps he did believe that he was going to be carjacked. But this does not explain his actions, that he got out of his car and confronted the two men and fired at them. For the typical person, driving away from the alleged danger would have been the most obvious choice.

Bunge's reaction expresses the violent and ruthless training of police officers across the country. That is, Bunge was acting on his training, to shoot and kill immediately anything considered a threat.

Bunge's actions also reflect something deeper about his training and the political situation in the United States. Whether conscious of it or not when he fired his gun, police are granted almost blanket immunity from their crimes and therefore feel free to mete out extreme violence on a regular basis.

According to research from Philip Matthew Stinson, a criminal justice expert at Bowling Green State University, while some 1,000 people are killed each year by police, since 2005, under both Democratic and Republican presidents, only 126 police officers have been arrested for murder or manslaughter for on-duty shooting. In other words, less than eight prosecutions a year. Moreover, only 44 of the 126 were convicted.

Ultimately, the police, their training and the legal protections they receive are an imperative of the capitalist system. The police serve the interest of the ruling class, they "serve and protect" the wealthiest layers of American society. They are trained to violently suppress any sign of opposition, which was on full display during the protests against the killing of George Floyd.



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