13-year-old boy killed by Chicago police

Brian Brown, Alexander Fangmann
2 April 2021

Adam Toledo, 13, is the city's youngest victim of a fatal police shooting in Chicago in decades. Toledo was reportedly shot once in the chest by Chicago Police Department (CPD) officers early Monday morning in the Little Village neighborhood on the southwest side of the city, under circumstances that remain obscure.

While Toledo's mother and other family members are demanding an explanation for how such a young boy came to be brutally murdered by the police, the administration of Mayor Lori Lightfoot is already working on a coverup operation to protect the officers involved.

According to a police spokesman, CPD officers responded to an alert of gunfire in the area at around 2:35 a.m. through the ShotSpotter detection system. According to police, "Officers observed two subjects in a nearby alley," after which both individuals, later identified as Toledo and 21-year-old Ruben Roman Jr., ran from the police. Toledo was chased by an as-yet unidentified officer to the alley behind Farragut Career Academy High School and killed in what police claim was "an armed confrontation." Roman was arrested and taken into custody, while Toledo was pronounced dead at the scene.

No weapons were reportedly found on either Toledo or Roman, but officers shared a photo of a gun allegedly recovered at the scene. Democratic Alderman George Cardenas defended the CPD, speculating the boy's death may have been justifiable, saying the city's Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA) informed him a weapon was found at the scene: "COPA has told me a gun was found near his body."

A neighbor of Toledo's family, Rafael Hurtado told the *Chicago Sun Times*, "It's hard to take CPD's word for it" that he was armed, "especially with everything that's been going on with the police shootings in other places." Chicago police have a long history of corruption, of torturing people into confessions or plea deals and planting evidence. The comparatively minor charge for Roman, a misdemeanor for resisting an officer, is suspiciously light given the story police have tried to suggest about the circumstances that led to Toledo's death.

Toledo's mother, Elizabeth Toledo, and other members of his family have demanded answers from the police and are appealing for any possible witnesses to come forward. Toledo told BlockClub Chicago, "I want the police report … and if anyone has seen anything, please come forward. I want justice for my son Adam." She also questioned why officers felt the need to use such force if, as they say, her son was running away.

Toledo, who had reported her son missing prior to the day of the shooting, was not informed of his murder until two days after his death. She initially thought officers were asking for a photo of her son because they were responding to a missing person report. Soon after sending a photo, police arrived at her home and asked her to accompany them to the Cook County Medical Examiner's office. Toledo said, "They told me I had to identify my son's body, and I couldn't even see him, they showed me a picture of my son Adam for just a couple of seconds."

Although the shooting was captured by police body cameras, footage has yet to be released due to stonewalling on the part of COPA and the Lightfoot administration, which fear another explosion of working class anger at the epidemic of police violence and murder.

COPA, created after the 2014 police murder of Laquan McDonald to replace the completely discredited Independent Police Review Authority, cynically cited Adam Toledo's young age to prevent release of the footage. In a statement, COPA wrote: "Due to the age of the victim, absent the issuance of a court order and pursuant to the Juvenile Court Act (705

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ILCS 405/5-905(5)), COPA is prevented from publicly releasing videos involving a juvenile." Spokesman Ephraim Eaddy said the agency is "making every effort and researching all legal avenues that will allow for the public release of all video materials which capture the tragic fatal shooting."

COPA's cynicism was topped only by Lightfoot, who wrote; "As a mother of a 13-year-old myself, I can only imagine the incredible pain this boy's parents are experiencing at this moment. My heart goes out to them." She continued, "While the investigation is ongoing it is critically important that COPA release relevant videos first to the family, and then to the public, as quickly as possible, with appropriate protections, given his age."

However, Matt Topic, a lawyer who specializes in freedom of information cases and helped force the release of the footage of McDonald's murder, noted on Twitter: "There is nothing to call for. CPD and the Mayor don't need COPA's permission and courts have repeatedly rejected COPA's interpretation of the Juv Ct Act."

In other words, it is entirely within Lightfoot's power to release the bodycam footage immediately. That she has not indicates an attempt by her administration to aid in the police coverup, helping them to buy time at the very least. COPA admitted as much in a Friday afternoon statement which said, "COPA's General Counsel concluded that the Juvenile Court Act does not bar publication of the body worn and third-party video camera footage the agency has obtained to date." The agency claimed officials were arranging a viewing of the "troubling video footage" for the family and the video would soon be made public.

It must be recalled that Lightfoot was herself brought back into Chicago politics by Rahm Emanuel in 2015 in order to clean up the image of the police. As president of the Chicago Police Board and head of the Chicago Police Accountability Task Force (CPATF), she was instrumental in drawing up a series of toothless recommendations for police reform, including the creation of COPA.

Rather than blaming the police who killed Toledo, Lightfoot instead shifted responsibility to society as a whole and even toward the boy's family saying, "We must ask ourselves how our social safety net failed this boy leading to the tragic events in the early hours of Monday morning."

It is true the social safety net Lightfoot refers to has been decimated. But primary responsibility for this in Chicago falls on the Democratic Party, which has dominated politics in the city and Illinois for many decades. Just recently, Lightfoot herself chose to allocate $281 million in federal pandemic funding, 70 percent of those discretionary funds, to police payroll.

Rather than being the result of the lack of a social safety net, in which police are forced to violently intervene in individual cases to maintain order, police violence and mayhem in Chicago, as elsewhere, is a response to vast levels of social inequality created by the capitalist system.

Little Village, a neighborhood where over 80 percent of residents identify as Hispanic, has a median household income of around $31,500 per year, and 34 percent of residents live below the poverty level, compared to 21 percent citywide.

The Chicago Police Department, like all police agencies, is given free rein by politicians to intimidate residents of working class neighborhoods like Little Village to prevent the emergence of political opposition to capitalist rule.

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