

Notes on police violence

North Carolina judge refuses to release body-cam footage of police killing of Andrew Brown Jr.

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North Carolina judge Jeff Foster refused Wednesday to release the body-camera footage of the police killing of Andrew Brown Jr., agreeing with prosecutors to delay making the footage public for at least 30 days. The only release scheduled was to the family and one lawyer in 10 days under the condition that they do not release it to the public.

The lawyer for the police argued that the shooting was justified, and the argument, accepted by the judge, was that he did not want body-camera footage shown until a possible trial of the officers who killed Brown. Seven officers involved in the shooting have been placed on leave, but no criminal charges have yet been brought against them.

Brown, a 42-year-old African American father of 10, was shot and killed by deputies from the Pasquotank County Sheriff's Office serving a drug search warrant around 8:30 a.m. on April 21 in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. A private autopsy ordered by Brown's family found that he was shot five times, with four of the shots hitting his right arm and one shot to the back of the head killing him. The official autopsy has not been released.

Members of Brown's family were shown just 20 seconds of redacted footage that omitted officers' faces on Monday. The family's lawyer who was authorized to view the footage said that the footage showed Brown was executed while sitting in his car with his hands "firmly on the wheel" when deputies began shooting.

Hundreds of residents of Elizabeth City, population 18,000, have been protesting in the streets since the killing of Brown and demanding that the body-camera footage from the shooting be released to the public. Democratic mayor Bettie J. Parker ordered an 8 p.m. curfew Tuesday in response to the protests, and the city and surrounding county are under states of emergency. Six protesters were arrested for curfew violations as militarized riot police confronted

peaceful protesters Tuesday night.

Nearly 200 people protested peacefully, chanting, "No charges, no peace!" and "Release the tape! The real tape! The whole tape!" When police began arresting people following the curfew, protesters shouted, "Shame on you!"

Democratic governor Roy Cooper has called for a special prosecutor to investigate Brown's death and the FBI has launched a civil rights investigation as well, indicating the extent to which the ruling class is concerned over the outrage sparked by the killing.

The only footage that is publicly available was obtained by a local news channel via a Freedom of Information Act Request. The footage from the city's camera shows deputies arriving in the back of a pickup with tactical gear. The deputies immediately dismounted once in the driveway of Brown's home, can be heard yelling to Brown to "put your hands up!" then open fire almost as quickly as they dismounted. Afterwards, video shows Brown's car riddled with bullets with the back window of the car blown out and bullet holes through the remaining windows.

The operation echoes the US-supported, trained and armed paramilitary death squads in El Salvador, Guatemala and Afghanistan, or the death squads in the Philippines who murder poor people under the pretext of an antidrug crackdown.

Benjamin Crump, who has taken many high-profile cases of African Americans killed by the police including Brown's, claimed, "This has become a constant sight across America, the evolution of policing that's now terrorizing communities of color," framing police violence as a purely racial problem, despite its impact on workers and poor people of every race and ethnicity. Crump has been criticized by the family of victims of police violence, such as Samaria Rice and Lisa Simpson, who called on him and others affiliated with Black Lives Matters to "stop

monopolizing and capitalizing off our fight for justice and human rights.”

Alameda, California

Body-camera footage of the death of Mario Arenales Gonzalez was released on Tuesday. Gonzalez was killed in Alameda County, California by being pinned with his body and face to the ground for five minutes in the same way that George Floyd was. Gonzalez became unresponsive while held down by the police and was later declared dead at the hospital. The killing took place on April 19, 2021, one day before the conviction of former Minneapolis, Minnesota police officer Derek Chauvin in the murder of Floyd.

Police were responding to two separate calls about a man who was loitering in a park. The body-camera footage shows Gonzalez struggling to answer basic questions made by the officer, trailing off at points or abruptly changing topics. While the questions are being asked, before the confrontation he can be seen accidentally dropping objects out of his hands while fidgeting with a comb. During this, the officer can be heard requesting another police unit to the scene.

Once the other officer is present, they ask if Gonzalez has an ID to which he cannot answer.

What follows in the footage is extremely disturbing. The officers force Gonzalez’s hands behind his back and ram him into the ground. One officer is asking Gonzalez questions as he is slowly killed by the other officer who aggressively drives his knee and then elbow into Gonzalez’s back, as Gonzalez cries out in pain while also answering the officers’ questions. Three officers were on him at this point, telling him to “stop resisting.” One of the officers asks if they should roll him over on his side with another denying this, saying, “I don’t want to lose what I got.” This continues up until the point that Gonzalez goes limp, after which an officer states that “he’s gone unresponsive.” Shortly thereafter an officer states that “he has no pulse” and they attempt to resuscitate him with CPR.

At no point did Gonzalez portray any aggressive behaviors towards the officers. The footage exposes as a lie the initial Alameda police report that claimed that after officers attempted to detain Gonzalez “a physical altercation ensued.”

Gonzalez’s brother Gerardo Gonzalez said at a press conference Tuesday that “Alameda police officers murdered my brother.”

The lawyer for the family, Julia Sherwin, explained, “His death was completely avoidable and unnecessary,” and that “Drunk guy in a park doesn’t equal a capital sentence.”

The three officers involved in the killing, Eric McKinley, Cameron Leahy, and James Fisher, have been placed on administrative leave.

Chicago, Illinois

Body-cam footage of the killing of 22-year-old Anthony Alvarez by a Chicago Police Department (CPD) officer, which shows that he was gunned down as he was running from police, was released Wednesday. The killing came just days after another CPD officer shot and killed 13-year-old Adam Toledo while the latter’s hands were in the air.

The police have not said whether Alvarez was suspected of a crime. What can be seen from video in the early morning of March 31 is that Alvarez was walking away from a gas station with some bags when a CPD SUV came around the corner. Alvarez dropped his bags and started running. After that the video shows Alvarez running away from the police into a residential area, tripping, getting back up and then the police officer raising his gun and shooting Alvarez as he ran. After being shot in the back, Alvarez asks, “Why are you shooting me?” to which the officer responded, “You had a gun.”

The officer who shot Alvarez attempted to handcuff him while he was bleeding on the ground, yelling “Cuff him! Cuff Him!” with his partner insisting that he be rendered aid. Alvarez was later pronounced dead at Illinois Masonic Medical Center.

After the exposure of the 2014 police murder of Laquan McDonald, the United States Department of Justice found that CPD officers “engage in tactically unsound and unnecessary foot pursuits, and that these foot pursuits too often end with officers unreasonably shooting someone—including unarmed individuals.”

Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot was apologetic towards the police, telling reporters ahead of the release of the video of Alvarez’s killing: “I understand, having investigated many of these shootings, that officers are in many instances called upon to make split-second decisions, particularly in instances like this one where there’s a gun.”



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