

Amid protests over police murder of Andrew Brown, Jr., Elizabeth City, North Carolina bans public assembly without permit

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Amid ongoing protests over the police murder of Andrew Brown Jr, Elizabeth City, North Carolina officials have reduced the daily curfew from 8 p.m. to midnight but are now requiring residents to apply for a permit to protest. The move is extraordinary and a flagrant violation of democratic rights.

Any public assembly in the city will now require the approval and signature of the city manager. Residents wishing to exercise their constitutional rights to free speech and assembly must provide the date of the planned demonstration, its time and location, contact information of a “chairperson” and the number of people expected to attend. All of this is to be submitted “not less than 15 days no more than 90 days prior to the date on which the proposed public assembly is to take place.”

This now means any protest in the next two weeks in the city of 20,000 is illegal, giving the police license to arrest participants en masse. Multiple protesters have already been arrested for violating curfew as they demanded justice for Brown, including several Thursday night.

Local journalists covering Thursday’s protest reported they thought police would arrest them as well. Crews on the ground said they were intimidated and forced to move far away from the central location of the demonstration, even though the media had permission from city leaders to cover the protests.

WITN journalist Amber Lake reported, “I thought we were going to get arrested even though we continued to heed officer commands and explained we had permission as working journalists to be on the streets past curfew.”

Friday marks the 10th night protesters have gathered

to demand the public release of body cam footage showing Pasquotank County sheriff deputies fatally shooting Brown while he was sitting in his car parked in the driveway of his home. Brown, a 42-year-old African American father of 10, was killed as deputies tried to serve him an arrest warrant for drug-related charges. A private autopsy ordered by his family indicated Brown was shot four times in his right arm and once in the back of the head, killing him.

North Carolina judge Jeff Foster refused to publicly release footage of the incident for at least 30 days, claiming its release would “create a serious threat to the fair, impartial and orderly administration of justice.” Brown’s family, previously only shown a 20-second clip of the footage, will be allowed to see the video next week, on the condition they not release it to the public.

An attorney for the Brown family that also saw the short clip said deputies shot Brown in the back of the head when he had his hands on his steering wheel and described the killing as an “execution.”

Footage from a city camera was made public after a local news channel filed a Freedom of Information Act request. In the video, deputies arrived in Brown’s driveway in the back of a truck, armed with tactical gear. The officers dismounted, yelled to Brown to “put your hands up” and opened fire in quick succession. Brown’s car can later be seen filled with bullet holes and its back window shattered.

Pasquotank County Sheriff Tommy Wooten released the names of the officers involved Thursday. Three deputies fired their weapons, including Investigator Daniel Meads, Deputy Sheriff II Robert Morgan and Corporal Aaron Lewellyn. Lewellyn has been

employed by the sheriff's office for just over two years, while Morgan and Meads have been there over five years each. Each of the officers remains on leave pending an investigation. Four officers who participated in the deadly raid but did not open fire have been restored to active duty.

The withholding of officers' body camera video and extraordinary crackdown on free speech taken by the city reflect the atrociousness of Brown's murder and immense fears among the ruling class toward growing popular outrage over the epidemic of police violence in the United States.

In California, Escondido police released footage Thursday of an officer fatally shooting 59-year-old Steven Olson, a white homeless man. Olson was shot by officer Chad Moore the day after former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin's conviction in the death of George Floyd.

Olson was confronted by police after a 911 caller reported a white male hitting vehicles with a metal pole or crowbar in a parking lot. Police said they were familiar with Olson and indicated he suffered from mental illness. Officers said Olson displayed erratic behavior and was "speaking incoherently" but showed no threatening behaviors and ultimately ran away from police.

Moore was responding to an unrelated burglary in the area and encountered Olson a few minutes later. Police claimed that Olson advanced on Moore as soon as he exited his vehicle. Olson is seen walking towards Moore with a squeegee and what police said was a crowbar. Moore drew his gun and said, "You've got some problem and you're going to get hit."

Moore began backing away from Olson, repeatedly threatening to shoot him.

"Steven, I'm going to shoot you. Drop that pipe now. Drop it," Moore said before he fired at Olson at least six times from seven feet away. Moore called for a medic and other police vehicles, which arrived shortly after. Officers provided medical assistance to Olson at the scene, but he was later pronounced dead at a hospital.

Olson had a history of encounters with police and was mentally ill, just as thousands of other homeless people in America. Since 2015, Olson had been placed on five mental health holds at local hospitals. Olson was arrested four times in the past year for threatening

people with weapons and had been the subject of 23 calls to 911, according to police.

Laban Davis, who has been homeless since 1993, told CBS8 Olson was not a threat to officers and was only holding a squeegee and a gardening tool.

"He came out of the alley, and he started walking up and down talking a bunch of crazy stuff. He was going like this up toward the cop and really the police had no reason to shoot him. He really wasn't no threat. He was crazy but was not swinging at the cop, he was just walking up to him, and the cop shot him over here," Davis said.

After the conviction of Chauvin, the Democratic Party and its affiliated media outlets proclaimed justice had been served and framed his crime as a departure from the "professionalism" of law enforcement. Furthermore, the issue of police violence is presented as an entirely racial matter, which only serves to mask the social function of police.

The United States is riven by class antagonisms. During a pandemic that has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, American billionaires saw their collective wealth skyrocket by trillions. Millions remain unemployed, face financial insecurity or are struggling with the debilitating side effects from being infected by COVID-19. The ruling class refused to implement any serious measures to prevent the spread of the virus for the sake of profit.

The levels of inequality that define American society cannot be maintained under traditional democratic rule. The ruling class employs police, what Friedrich Engels called "special bodies of armed men," to subjugate the working class and protect capitalist property. The fight against police violence requires the unity of the working class—regardless of race and other forms of identity—on the basis of a common struggle against the capitalist system.



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