Officers involved in murder of Breonna Taylor arrested on federal charges

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The US Department of Justice (DoJ) announced on Thursday that two current and two former officers of the Louisville Metropolitan Police Department (LMPD) in Louisville, Kentucky have been indicted on federal charges in connection with the brutal murder of Breonna Taylor in her apartment in March 2020.

Ex-LPMD detectives Joshua Jaynes and Brett Hankison and current LMPD Sergeant Kyle Meany and detective Kelly Hanna Goodlett were arrested Thursday and are facing a combination of civil rights offenses, unlawful conspiracies, obstruction offenses and use of excessive force for their roles in carrying out a no-knock warrant that ended in Taylor's death. All of the charged officers are white, while Taylor was black.

Jaynes and Hankison had been previously fired by the department for their roles in the incident. The LMPD said in a statement that termination proceedings began on Thursday against both Meany and Goodlett.

The Louisville *Courier Journal* reported that Jaynes, 40, who was fired for lying on the search warrant that led to the deadly raid at Taylor's apartment, was taken into custody on Thursday morning by the FBI and booked in the Oldham County Detention Center, near the town of Buckner, approximately 30 miles northwest of Louisville.

Taylor, a 26-year-old emergency room technician, was at home in bed with her boyfriend Kenneth Walker shortly after midnight on March 13, 2020, when at least seven plainclothes LMPD officers smashed down the door to her apartment without warning. Although the officers claim that they announced themselves before entry, Walker said he did not hear any warning and, thinking they were intruders, fired a warning shot at them, striking one officer in the leg.

Three of the officers returned a total of 32 shots, six of which struck Taylor. Although Walker was initially arrested for assault and attempted murder, the charges against him were dismissed with prejudice 12 months later. The police claimed the raid, in which no search of the apartment was ever conducted, was part of a narcotics investigation involving Taylor's former boyfriend.

What followed was a carefully orchestrated coverup of the brutal murder by Louisville law enforcement that included an incident report which claimed that Taylor had no injuries and no forced entry occurred.

The real facts of the shooting would never have come to light—and the present DoJ indictments would never have been brought—if it had not been for the insistent demands of Taylor's family and supporters in Louisville for justice for Taylor and the growing anti-police violence protests that swept across the US and around the world in the spring and summer of 2020 following the public execution of George Floyd by Minneapolis, Minnesota, police officer Derek Chauvin.

During a press conference on Thursday, Attorney General Merrick Garland said, "Among other things, the federal charges announced today allege that members of LMPD's Place-Based Investigations Unit falsified the affidavit used to obtain the search warrant of Ms. Taylor's home, that this act violated federal civil rights laws, and that those violations resulted in Ms. Taylor's death. Breonna Taylor should be alive today."

Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke said, "On March 13, 2020, Breonna Taylor should have awakened in her home as usual, but tragically she did not." A DoJ press release said the federal charges against the four "allege violations of the U.S. Constitution, rather than of state law. The federal charges also allege excessive use of force with respect to Taylor and a person staying in her apartment; violations not included in the Commonwealth's case."

However, neither Garland nor Clarke explained why it took the federal government nearly 29 months to bring charges in relation to the criminal actions of the Louisville police department. The attorneys general also did not

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explain why the indictments excluded two other officers who discharged their weapons in Taylor's apartment that night, Jonathan Mattingly and Myles Cosgrove, the latter of which fired the fatal shot that killed Taylor.

The indictment against Hankison has two grand jury charges stemming from the fact that, after the two other officers had fired into the apartment from the doorway, he "moved from the doorway to the side of the apartment and fired ten more shots through a window and a sliding glass door, both of which were covered by blinds and curtains."

The first charge says, "while acting under the color of law," Hankison willfully deprived Breonna Taylor and Kenneth Walker of the right "to be free from unreasonable seizures," and that the officer fired five bullets through a bedroom wall.

The second charges says that Hankison "while acting under the color of law" willfully deprived the three individuals living in the apartment next to Breonna Taylor of the right "to be free from an officer's use of unjustified force that shocks the conscience," and that the officer fired five bullets into the living room of Apartment 4 through a sliding glass door.

Both charges state that "there was no longer a lawful objective justifying the use of deadly force" and the offenses "involved the use of a dangerous weapon and an attempt to kill." If convicted on the civil rights charges, Hankison faces a life sentence.

Hankison was previously the only officer charged with three state offenses of "wanton endangerment" and, during a trial last March, he was acquitted. None of the other officers were charged in Kentucky and state Attorney General Daniel Cameron determined that the use of force was justified.

The indictment against Jaynes and Meany contains charges of civil rights violations, conspiracy, falsification of records and making a false statement to a federal investigator. The first charge states that the two officers violated Taylor's civil rights by swearing out a warrant affidavit for the apartment which they knew contained false information and "was not supported by probable cause."

The second and third charges are against Jaynes only and allege the former officer falsified documents related to police claims that Breonna Taylor was "receiving packages" at her apartment for her former boyfriend which justified the warrant for a no-knock warrant.

The fourth charge is against Meany only and alleges that he knowingly lied to FBI investigators when he told them that the LMPD SWAT unit had asked his Place Based Investigations unit to request a no-knock warrant when no request had been made. Finally, the indictment against Kelly Goodlett contains one charge of conspiracy for collaborating with Jaynes in falsifying the information contained in the warrant affidavit.

Jaynes and Meany face maximum life sentences if convicted on the civil rights charges. Goodlett can be sentenced to 20 years in prison for the conspiracy charge.

In response to the indictments, Breonna Taylor's mother, Tamika Palmer, gave a press conference on Thursday morning and said, "What we've been saying was the truth, that they shouldn't have been there, and that Breonna didn't deserve that. Today's overdue, but it still hurts."

The fact that the DoJ has been compelled to bring the federal charges against the four is a measure of the blatant criminality that prevails in the Louisville police department and, as a matter of fact, in law enforcement offices in cities, towns and counties across the US.

For reasons bound up with the domestic political crisis of the Biden administration, the DoJ has elected to bring federal charges against the officers that open a window into the blatantly brutal, violent and criminal practices of the police as well as the lying that goes on after the fact to cover up these crimes.

The federal indictments do not guarantee a conviction and, in the end, the struggle against the police violence that gets meted out daily against workers of all racial and ethnic backgrounds in the US requires the political mobilization of the working class against the capitalist system and its state apparatus.

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