Anger builds following police murder of unarmed man at father's funeral in West Virginia

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Anger is building in the small town of Nutter Fort, West Virginia, a suburb of Clarksburg located in poverty-stricken Harrison County, following the police murder of 37-year-old Jason Owens on August 24. Owens was gunned down by US Marshals as he was serving as a pallbearer at the funeral of his father, Junior Owens. The elder Owens had died unexpectedly four days prior.

In the over two weeks since the killing of Jason Owens, the US Marshals have released a lone lying statement, which falsely claimed that, according to witnesses, Owens pulled a gun on the Marshals at they attempted to arrest him.

No police body camera footage or photos have been produced since the killing to corroborate police claims that Owens pointed a weapon at police or attempted to resist arrest.

In several interviews, including some conducted outside the Harrison County Courthouse during an August 29 protest, family and friends of Owens have disputed virtually the entire narrative proffered by the police apparatus.

Speaking to the Associated Press, family friend and witness to Owens' killing, Cassandra Whitecotton, said, "There was no warning whatsoever," before US Marshals shot Owens. She told AP that she was mere feet away from Owens as he was hugging his aunt, Evelyn O'Dell, when US Marshals opened fired on him.

"They yelled Jason's name. They just said 'Jason' and then started firing," Whitecotton said. "There was no identifications they were US Marshals—anything. They did not render this man any aid at all. Never once they touched him to render any aid whatsoever."

The one statement released by the US Marshals following the shooting said, "US Marshals-led Mountain State Fugitive Task Force and other law enforcement agencies were involved in an officer-involved shooting during a fugitive investigation ..."

The statement claimed that "the subject produced a firearm" prompting them to fire, after which they claimed that police "immediately rendered first aid."

Speaking to WV News, O'Dell, Owens' aunt, disputed the Marshals' statement. She said the police "shot him at his dad's funeral."

"He just took his dad out; he was a pallbearer. He had just laid his dad in the back of a hearse, and he was walking around, and I was hugging him. Next thing I know, somebody yelled 'Jason.' I still had my hand on my shoulder, my one hand from hugging him, when the first bullet hit him. He never pulled a gun or nothing, and we're trying to get justice for him because they cold-blooded killed him. He never pulled a gun." She reiterated, "He did not pull a gun."

In an interview with CBS5 WDTV, Denzil Pratt, a family friend and witness to the murder, said that police never rendered aid to Owens.

"The bad part," said Pratt, "was he was still alive when he hit the ground. He was breathing, and nobody tried to save him—nobody, not a cop, not one of them. They covered him up with a sheet."

Ashley Carrol, another friend and witness, corroborated Pratt's account to CBS5: "They didn't even try to revive him. They just ripped his shirt off, seen all of the bullet holes and they were done," said Carroll.

O'Dell also recounted the brutality and indifference to human life the Marshals displayed to her nephew, telling CBS5: "He's laying there. I'm sitting there watching him take his last breath. He's trying to put his arm up like this, they're taking their foot and kicking his hands down."

In an attempt to cover up Owens' murder and contain anger within the community, the West Virginia State

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Police has launched an “investigation” into the shooting of Owens, which will inevitably exonerate the Marshals’ murderous actions.

According to MappingPoliceViolence.us, from 2013 to 2022, 98.1 percent of police killings have not resulted in the officer being charged with a crime. Fewer than one percent are convicted.

WV News reported on Wednesday that the West Virginia State Police responded to a records request from the agency for “body camera video” with a statement claiming that they were “not in possession of any records of your request.”

Despite the billions wasted on police departments every year by Democratic and Republican politicians alike, WV News wrote in a recent article: “Follow-up calls Wednesday and Thursday to Acting US Marshal Terry Moore, Harrison Sheriff Robert Matheny and Bridgeport Police Chief Mark Rogers indicated there was no body camera footage of the shooting …”

The federal police have claimed that Owens was a wanted fugitive due to an alleged parole violation. However, they have yet to specify exactly what this violation was. Owens had been previously sentenced to prison after a 2018 fight with an officer following a vehicle pursuit. Owens was sentenced to 3-13 years in prison for briefly strangling the officer during the fight. During his sentencing hearing, Owens told an indifferent judge that he was suffering a mental breakdown at the time of the incident and using drugs.

According to US Census figures, roughly 65,000 people, overwhelmingly white like Owens, live in Harrison County. As with the rest of Appalachia, Harrison County used to employ thousands of miners. However, as of 2021, the US Census recorded a poverty rate of 13.6 percent in the county, or over 9,000 people.

Nutter Fort, where the shooting occurred, is a suburb of Clarksburg, West Virginia. During the Civil War, the B&O railroad line made Clarksburg a key supply base for the Union army. At one point, over 7,000 Union soldiers were stationed in the city. While over 10 percent of residents in Harrison County do not have access to the internet, according to Wikipedia, Clarksburg was the first city in West Virginia to have phone lines installed in the 1880s.

Fueled by the labor of local coal miners who toiled in the mines, the population of Clarksburg peaked at 35,000 just prior to the 1929 Stock Market crash. Within 10 years, however, only 30,000 remained and by 2020 that figure has been just about halved to 16,000.

Owens’ killing explodes the racialist narrative advanced by the Democratic Party and their fake socialist appendages in the pseudo-left, who claim that daily police killings in the United States are a function of “racism” or “white supremacy” that is ingrained “in the DNA” of either the institutions themselves, the founding of the country, or in “white people” more generally.

This false presentation of police violence serves to obfuscate the class role of the police and divide the working class. While local, state and federal police departments are riddled with fascists and racists, they exist to uphold the capitalist system, protect the financial oligarchy and defend the rights of private property owners, not to enforce a racial caste system.

For nearly a decade the police in the US have killed over 1,000 people a year, every year. MappingPoliceViolence.us has recorded 783 killings by police as of August 31, exceeding last year’s record pace, with 15 more killed this year, compared to this same time last year.

While Native and African Americans are killed at a disproportionate rate compared to their relative size in the population, the majority of those killed by police every year are white men under 50, like Owens.

Although Owens was laid to rest on Friday, his funeral has not dampened anger throughout the community and the broader working class over his unjustified killing. A local Facebook group called “Justice for Jason Owens,” formed on August 25, already claims a membership of nearly 900, more than half the population of Nutter Fort.

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