

US Justice Department investigation details widespread civil rights abuses by Louisville, Kentucky Metro Police Department

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On Wednesday, the United States Justice Department (DoJ) released the findings of its two-year civil rights investigation into the Louisville Metro Police Department (LMPD) and Louisville/Jefferson County Metro Government (Louisville Metro) in Louisville, Kentucky, that was launched following the brutal police murder of Breonna Taylor during a raid on March 13, 2020. The full 90-page report can be viewed [here](#).

The 26-year-old Taylor, an African American emergency room technician and aspiring nurse, was killed after three plainclothes officers executed a so-called “no knock” search warrant by battering down the door of her apartment shortly after midnight. Taylor’s boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, who was staying with Taylor at the time, believed they were being robbed, and fearful for their lives, fired a warning shot which struck the leg of one of the officers.

Officers Jonathan Mattingly, Brett Hankison and Myles Cosgrove, who never announced they were police, responded by indiscriminately firing 32 shots into the apartment, six of which struck Taylor, killing her. A number of rounds entered an adjacent apartment where a family—including a five-year-old child and a pregnant woman—were sleeping.

On August 4, 2022, the DoJ charged four officers—Joshua Jaynes, Hankison, Kyle Meany and Kelly Hanna Goodlett—for their role in Taylor’s killing. The review of the LMPD by the DoJ is separate from the federal criminal case surrounding the officers that remains underway.

In a press release, the DoJ writes that the LMPD and Louisville Metro knowingly engaged “in a pattern or practice of conduct that violates the U.S. Constitution

and federal law.” The DoJ also stated that “it has entered into an agreement in principle with Louisville Metro and LMPD, which have committed to resolving the department’s findings through a court-enforceable consent decree with an independent monitor, rather than contested litigation.”

The report’s key findings state that LMPD “uses excessive force, including unjustified neck restraints and the unreasonable use of police dogs and tasers; conducts searches based on invalid warrants; unlawfully executes search warrants without knocking and announcing; unlawfully stops, searches, detains, and arrests people during street enforcement activities, including traffic and pedestrian stops; unlawfully discriminates against Black people in its enforcement activities; violates the rights of people engaged in protected free speech critical of policing; and along with Louisville Metro, discriminates against people with behavioral health disabilities when responding to them in crisis.”

In addition, the DoJ “also identified deficiencies in LMPD’s response to and investigation of domestic violence and sexual assault, including its responses to allegations that LMPD officers engaged in sexual misconduct or domestic violence.” On this point, the DoJ provides a number of examples, but omits the fact that the LMPD was implicated in 2020 of deliberately destroying and concealing 738,000 records of sexual abuse of youth in the department’s program for aspiring police officers.

On the use of police dogs, the report cites a chilling example of an officer ordering his K-9 to maul an unarmed 14-year-old African American youth. The officer stumbled on the teenager, who was lying face

down on the grass, while searching for a robbery suspect. Without warning, the officer immediately ordered his dog to attack the teen, commanding it to bite him at least seven times. The dog gnawed on the teen's arm for 30 seconds while officers watched, with one officer telling him to "Stop fighting my dog!" even though the teen was lying still with one arm behind his back.

Another example of excessive force that the report cites is an officer striking a 110-pound intoxicated white woman repeatedly in the face with his flashlight after she tried to bite the outside of his shoe while he pressed his foot into her chest. The officer called his supervisor and said that he "beat the shit out of [the woman] ... as soon as she put her mouth on me." He could not recall how many times he struck her.

The DoJ's assertion of discrimination against black people exclusively is an attempt to inject the oft-repeated claims of the Democratic Party and those in its orbit that police violence is fundamentally a racial issue. While it is true that African Americans are disproportionately impacted by police violence, which the report shows, the reality is that police violence affects people of all races, all of whom are overwhelmingly from the working class and the poor. In fact, many of the victims that are referenced in the report are white.

The report also attempts to treat the LMPD as something of an anomaly. The criminal behavior of officers derives neither from the fact that police departments and governments actively seek to cultivate and recruit the most reactionary elements in society, nor the role of police in defending the private property of the capitalist ruling class, but, according to the DoJ, from "deficient training, substandard facilities and equipment, and inadequate support for mental health and wellness."

The truth is that LMPD is only unique in the fact that it is one of the few departments to be exposed to such a degree. One could just as easily uncover similarly horrific findings at any of the approximately 18,000 federal, state, county, tribal and local police departments throughout the country. Echoing the case of Breonna Taylor, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) officer Mark Hanneman shot and killed 22-year-old Amir Locke during a "no-knock" raid in February of last year. The officer was

ultimately not charged in the slaying.

That the DoJ even carried out an investigation of LMPD must be viewed within the context of the profound crisis of the capitalist system, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing war drive of US imperialism against Russia and China.

This crisis has led to the explosive growth of working class struggles taking place throughout the world. The ruling class is terrified of the prospect of a unified struggle among workers and young people against police violence and all the horrors that capitalism produces. The investigation of LMPD is an attempt to cover-up and absolve the department of wrongdoing, while simultaneously suppressing opposition in the working class.

Concluding its report, the DoJ offers "remedial measures," in truth wholly cosmetic and entirely toothless, to correct the issues within LMPD, which will require providing even more public funding to the police.

The reality is that police violence is fundamentally rooted in the capitalist system, and it will not be resolved by reforms promoted by the Democrats and Republicans, but from the conscious struggle of the international working class for socialism.



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