

Three San Antonio police officers charged with murder after gunning down 46-year-old woman in her locked apartment

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This past Friday three San Antonio, Texas, police officers, Sgt. Alfred Flores and officers Eleazar Alejandro and Nathaniel Villalobos, were charged with murder in the killing of 46-year-old Melissa Perez. A mother of four and grandmother to two, Perez was shot multiple times by the three officers while locked inside of her apartment after 2:00 a.m. on June 23.

A GoFundMe organized to help cover Perez's funeral expenses notes, "she did not have life insurance and her children do not have the means to pay for her burial ... please pray for her four children and relatives that she leaves behind."

In an attempt to cut off mass anger at the latest heinous police slaying, San Antonio police chief William McManus announced that the three officers who shot and killed Perez had been suspended without pay, charged with murder and taken into custody.

According to Mapping Police Violence, Perez is one of at least 504 people who have been killed by police in America so far this year. As has been the case for the last decade, on average, US police kill three people a day and over 1,000 a year. Less than 2 percent of these killings result in any charges against police.

The shooting of Perez was caught on multiple police body cameras. A portion of the video was released during a Friday night press conference held less than 20 hours after the shooting.

In the press conference, McManus said it appeared that Perez was having a "mental health crisis" and that the shootings were "not consistent with SAPD's policy and training." He said the police "placed themselves in a situation where they used deadly force, which was not

reasonable given all the circumstances as we now understand them."

In an interview with the *San Antonio Express-News*, Brent Packard, a lawyer working with the Perez family on a civil lawsuit against the city, confirmed that Perez had a history of mental illness.

"We believe SAPD's conduct was not only an egregious constitutional violation of Ms. Perez' foundational rights, but that this behavior stems from many systemic failures within SAPD," Packard said.

Nearly one in five US adults has a mental illness and people with an untreated mental illness are 16 times more likely to be killed by police compared to other people, according to a 2015 study from the Treatment Advocacy Center. Of the 1,165 individuals shot and killed by police in 2018, the *Washington Post* confirmed that more than 200, at least 25 percent, were suffering from a mental health crisis at the time of their deaths.

The heavily edited police body-camera video shows that none of the three cops who fired into Perez's apartment was in danger at the time of the shooting. Instead, it appears that the police had grown impatient with the woman, who was obviously in the throes of severe mental crisis, and decided to escalate the situation in order to force a violent conclusion.

Police claim that they were initially dispatched to the Southwest Side apartment complex because Perez had been cutting the wires of an external fire alarm system. Police documents assert that during initial questioning Perez told them she was cutting the wires because "the FBI was listening to her."

In the video released by the police, the footage begins with a cop approaching a person and their dog who are standing in the grass outside an apartment complex. In the blurred out footage, it appears that as the person turns to walk away, the cop yells, “Hey lady, get over here.” The woman, believed to be Perez, continues to walk away from the cop, who again tells them to “come over here.”

The footage then cuts to an hour later, just after 1:40 a.m. By this time there were multiple police officers standing outside the patio of Perez’s first floor apartment. One cop leapt over the balcony railing and proceeded to rip out the screen on a window leading into Perez’s apartment. Perez is heard telling the police, “Don’t come in.”

After police gathered themselves they attempted to break into Perez’s apartment again.

A little after 2 a.m. a cop tried to break into the apartment through the window. As Perez approached him he pulled back and drew his gun and pointed at Perez, warning her, “You are going to get shot.” Perez, responded “Shoot me. You don’t have a warrant.” As a second cop leapt over the railing, a third cop, who appears to be Eleazar Alejandro, began shooting his pistol through the window into the apartment.

After police fired at least five shots at Perez there was a brief lull before Perez was heard yelling “Hey!” at which point another cop yelled “Back up!” followed by multiple gunshots through Perez’s glass patio door. A third cop is also seen firing through the window into Perez’s apartment. Within 10 seconds, three different cops fired over a dozen rounds into the apartment, killing Perez.

The police affidavit claims that Perez was swinging a hammer at police when they attempted to break into the apartment through her patio door. The affidavit claims a cop suffered a minor arm injury when Perez allegedly threw a glass candle holder through the window. No guns were discovered inside the apartment and it does not appear, as of this writing, that anyone else was injured from the multiple bullets that were fired into the apartment complex.

All of the police involved in the killing of Perez had been on the force for over two years, with Flores having been with the department for 14 years, Alejandro for five, while Villalobos has been a cop for two years. While the three cops have been charged with murder, there is no guarantee they will be tried, much less convicted. If the case does go to trial there is the distinct possibility they will only be found guilty of a lesser crime, as was the case with former Lonoke

County, Arkansas, deputy sheriff, Michael Davis, who was found guilty in the police killing of 17-year-old Hunter Brittain last March.

At around 3 a.m. on June 23, 2021, Davis shot and killed 17-year-old Brittain during a traffic stop outside of Cabot, a small city about a half hour north of Little Rock. Despite the fact that Brittain was unarmed and non-violent, Davis, who did not turn on his body camera until after the shooting, claimed he “feared for his life” when the youth got out of his truck during the stop to place a can of antifreeze behind his tire to prevent his truck, which he was trying to fix, from rolling into the patrol car.

While Davis was charged with felony manslaughter, after a four-day trial, held in a US Army National Guard armory, away from angry family and community members, Davis was only found guilty of misdemeanor negligent homicide and sentenced to one year in jail plus a \$1,000 fine.

It is exceedingly rare that police in America face any repercussions for assaulting and killing poor and working class people. According to a database maintained by Bowling Green State University criminal justice professor Philip Stinson, in 2021, out of over 1,140 police killings, only 21 police were charged with murder or manslaughter from an on-duty shooting. This figure, representing less than 2 percent of all killings, is the highest since Stinson began tracking in 2005.

As was the case with the police killing of Tyre Nichols in Memphis earlier this year, none of the officers involved in the shooting of Perez appeared to be a different “race” than the victim, undercutting the Democratic Party narrative that police killings are a manifestation of “white supremacy.”

While racist and fascistic attitudes are cultivated in police departments around the world, police violence is fundamentally a class question. As long as capitalism exists, police, no matter how “diverse” or well-trained, will continue to assault and kill workers and the poor. As inequality continues to widen, the question of ending police violence is not about “reforming” or “reimagining” police, but uniting the working class in the fight for socialism against the source of police violence, the capitalist system.



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