

Notes on police violence in America

Unarmed Minnesota father shot and killed in traffic stop by state trooper; 6 Mississippi cops, who led torture “goon squad,” plead guilty to several felonies

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Two separate databases maintained by Mapping Police Violence (MPV) and the *Washington Post* have cataloged over 570 police killings so far this year in the United States.

As of July 31, the *Post* has recorded 572 killings, while Mapping Police Violence has recorded 602 killings as of July 8. The figure recorded by Mapping Police Violence is just under the pace of last year’s 1,201 recorded police killings, the most recorded by MPV in the last decade.

In the early morning hours of July 31, Ricky Cobb II, an African American father of five, became one the latest victims of police violence. Cobb was shot and killed by Minnesota State Trooper Ryan Londregan, shortly after 2:15 a.m. during a traffic stop. According to police, Cobb was pulled over because his taillights were not operational. During the traffic stop, police claim they discovered that Cobb was wanted on a “probable cause arrest for a felony order-for-protection violation.”

Londregan and two other police involved in the traffic stop, but who did not fire their weapons, troopers Brett Siede and Garrett Erickson, have been placed on paid administrative leave pending the completion of a so-called “independent” investigation by the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA). The BCA is managed by the same state agency as the troopers—the Minnesota Department of Public Safety.

Body camera and police dash-cam footage were released earlier this week by the Minnesota State Patrol following protests from the family of Cobb and community members. The footage shows that Cobb was unarmed when he was shot in the driver’s seat of his vehicle on Interstate 94 in Minneapolis, the same city where George Floyd was murdered over three years ago, sparking massive international, multiracial protests against unending police violence.

In the video released by police, Cobb is shown in his car pulled over on the side of the road. Three troopers approached Cobb’s vehicle with Trooper Seide going to the driver’s side, while Londregan approached the passenger’s side of the vehicle. Seide repeatedly told Cobb that he had to get out of the vehicle without giving him a reason.

At one point, Cobb asked Seide if the stop is over a warrant, and Seide replied “No,” and that he had to “give me your keys.” After a minute of

demanding Cobb step out of the vehicle, Seide opened the door and went “hands on” with Cobb. At the same time Londregan opened the passenger side door pulled out his gun and immediately pointed it at Cobb, yelling, “Get out of the car now!”

After yelling at Cobb to exit the vehicle, Londregan fired two shots at Cobb, striking him. It is unclear if Cobb began to drive away before the shots were fired or after. Bleeding and dying, Cobb drove his vehicle for approximately a quarter of a mile before crashing into the center divider on the interstate.

In a statement released Thursday, the BCA claimed that during a search of Cobb’s car, police discovered two shell casings and a handgun. The BCA statement did not say if the handgun was loaded or if any bullets were found in the vehicle. However, the statement did note that at no time in any of the video obtained by police is Cobb seen holding the gun.

A statement released by the American Civil Liberties Union following the shooting notes that none of the footage provided shows a “clear justification” for the use of force.

In a press conference held on Wednesday, Cobb’s family called for the firing and charging of the police involved in the shooting. Octavia Ruffin told reporters her brother was a “good man ... a provider for all of us.”

According to police, the BCA investigation will take at least 60 days after which a Hennepin County grand jury might be impaneled to consider charges.

While police are empowered by capitalist politicians and the courts to take the lives of workers and the poor in an instant if they ever feel “threatened,” so-called “justice” for victims of police violence rarely, if ever, comes.

In a particularly heinous case of police violence, on Thursday, the US Department of Justice announced that six Mississippi police officers had pled guilty to multiple felonies related to the torture and killing of African Americans over the last four years. The federal investigation was precipitated by a lawsuit filed by Michael Corey Jenkins and Eddie Terrell Parker, residents of Braxton, Mississippi, located near Jackson, the state capital.

In their lawsuit, Jenkins and Parker alleged that the police broke into the house they were staying at without a warrant. For nearly two hours, the six cops tortured, beat, assaulted, zapped with tasers, and in the case of Jenkins, put a gun into his mouth and shot him, lacerating his tongue and shattering his jaw in the process.

Former Rankin County Sheriff's Department officers Christian Dedmon, 28, Hunter Elward, 31, Brett McAlpin, 52, Jeffrey Middleton, 46, and Daniel Opdyke, 27, and Joshua Hartfield, 31, a Richland police officer have all pleaded guilty to multiple charges, including discharge of a firearm during a crime of violence, conspiracy to obstruct justice, conspiracy against rights, deprivation of rights under color of law and obstruction of justice.

In addition to pleading guilty for criminal actions inflicted against Jenkins and Parker, Dedmon, Elward and Opdyke also pleaded guilty to three federal felony charges related to a separate December 4, 2022 incident. In that case, prosecutors said Dedmon assaulted a white man, including with a taser, and fired his pistol near his head in order to force a confession while Elward and Opdyke looked on.

The Mississippi officers' reign of terror against black and white men makes clear that police violence is ultimately a class phenomenon, in which the police target working class victims from every racial and ethnic background.

In a statement released Thursday, US Attorney General Merrick Garland wrote: "The defendants in this case tortured and inflicted unspeakable harm on their victims, egregiously violated the civil rights of citizens who they were supposed to protect, and shamefully betrayed the oath they swore as law enforcement officers."

According to a federal lawsuit filed last month by Jenkins and Parker and court documents released as part of the guilty pleas, the six officers were part of a "Special Response Team," similar to ultra-violent "Scorpion Unit" that carried out the police murder of Tyre Nichols earlier this year in Memphis, Tennessee. Like the Scorpion Unit, the Special Response Team was provided extra "training" and deployed to "high-crime" areas.

An investigation by the Associated Press has linked the Special Response Team, whose members are referred to as the "Goon Squad," to at least four "violent encounters with black men since 2019 that left two dead and another with lasting injuries."

The AP noted that in court documents the "Goon Squad" earned its nickname because of the officers' willingness to "use excessive force and not report it."

According to court documents on January 24, 2023 a white neighbor rang up Rankin County Deputy Brett McAlpin and complained that there were two black men staying with a white woman inside the home next to him and that the men were taking advantage of the woman. After the call, McAlpin reached out to his fellow "Goon Squad" accomplices and asked them, if "'y'all available for a mission?"

The six cops stalked the men outside the home before breaking into it without a warrant.

Once inside the residence the police handcuffed Jenkins and Parker and began assaulting and waterboarding them. The police found a sex toy which they mounted on a BB gun and forced into the mouth of Parker, while Christian Dedmon tried to sexually assault Jenkins with the toy. For

nearly two hours the police used their stun guns on the men while pouring milk, liquor and syrup on the them.

After forcing the men to shower together, the police assaulted them again with tasers and a metal sword.

After some 90 minutes of torture, Elward eventually forced Jenkins on his knees and put his pistol in his mouth in a "mock execution." After pulling the trigger once, Elward chambered a round and pulled the trigger again, this time sending a bullet through Jenkins tongue, which then shattered his jaw and exited through his neck, nearly killing him.

Seeking to cover up their criminality, the police planted drugs in the house and stole a hard drive that had surveillance footage, which they tried to dispose of. The police also agreed upon a set of lies, which they regurgitated in falsified police reports.

In a press conference at the end of June, Mary Jenkins detailed some of the horrific hardships her son has had to deal with since the shooting. She explained that sometimes her son cannot eat food and has to be fed with a syringe. Jenkins noted that as part of her son's rehabilitation, he has to meet with a speech doctor to learn how to talk again.

In another exception that proves the rule, nearly one year after shooting and killing unarmed Donovan Lewis in his bed last August, a Columbus, Ohio, grand jury this week charged former police Officer Ricky Anderson with murder. Lewis, 20, was shot and killed by Anderson, a 30-year officer, less than one second after Anderson entered his bedroom.

In their research of Anderson, NBC4 found that the former cop had been disciplined multiple times over his career. In 2018, Anderson was "reprimanded" after he left his body camera at his home while another officer deployed their taser on a "suspect." That same year and again in 2020, Anderson was "disciplined" for turning off his police dash cam during "vehicle pursuits."

In a statement on Friday commenting on the charging of Anderson nearly a year after the killing of Lewis, Rex Elliott, an attorney for the Lewis family, noted the real "two-tier" justice system that exists under capitalism.

"The reality is that there is a different justice system for citizens and a different justice system for police officers," said Elliott. "This never should have taken this long."



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