

New York police murder 13-year-old youth

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On Friday night, police in the upstate New York city of Utica shot and killed 13-year-old Nyah Mway, a refugee youth. Mway had graduated from the eighth grade two days earlier.

Police stopped the youth and a friend at about 10:00 p.m. while they were investigating a spate of robberies in West Utica.

Police camera video shows the cops telling the youth, amid flashing police lights, that they had stopped them because one was riding his bicycle on the sidewalk. They then make Mway put his hands in the air. But when they ask to search him for weapons, he runs in fear.

The police video, which has clearly been edited, appears to show the youth holding an object, which the police allege looked to them like a gun. The police begin shouting that he is armed. Video taken by a bystander shows the police tackling Mway to the ground. At that point Officer Patrick Husnay, a six-year veteran of the force, fires a single shot into Mway's chest from a standing position.

The weapon recovered by the police was a pellet gun supposedly designed to look like a lethal weapon. The officer shown in the police video examining the device could not identify it correctly.

The video was taken by a bystander, apparently standing on a nearby porch. It is horrifying.

One can hear off-camera what is apparently a group of young people shouting to the police again and again to be careful and warning them that they are being videotaped. When the cop shoots Mway, cries of distress and incredulity go up from the onlookers.

Utica is a former industrial city of about 60,000 people some 240 miles north of New York City. It was a center of textile manufacturing in the early to mid-20th century and a center of abolitionism in the 19th century where it was a major stop on the Underground Railroad.

It has become impoverished—nearly 30 percent of its population lives below the federal poverty line—like many of the smaller former industrial cities of New York. It is a center for refugees, who make up a quarter of the population, including particularly Bosnians and Karens. At least 43 languages are spoken in the city.

Karens are an ethnic minority from Myanmar (Burma), where they comprise about 7 percent of the population. Because of the Burmese government's efforts to suppress a Karen insurgency, hundreds of thousands of civilians have become refugees, many of them living in abominable conditions on the Thai-Burmese border.

At a press conference, Utica Mayor Michael P. Galime, a Republican, said, "What happened yesterday evening in our community is an event that has become all too familiar and routine, over and over and over again." This was evidently an attempt to placate anger throughout the city.

Also on Saturday, the Utica police department issued a statement. It said, "Our thoughts are with our officers involved and the family of the deceased juvenile."

The department put Husnay and the two other officers involved on paid administrative leave and promised a full investigation. The New York State Attorney General's Office is investigating the shooting to determine if it was justified.

The killing has set off protests in Utica. On Saturday, a vigil was held for Mway comprised of people of many backgrounds, including Karen, white, African American and Latino workers.

Speakers demanded an investigation, claiming the police story did not add up. One speaker told the vigil, "This country is supposed to be a country of freedom, a country of peace. What's going on? Did we run from one persecutor to another?"

After the vigil, a group of youth confronted the cops at the police station, chanting, "No justice, no peace!"

In a GoFundMe fundraiser, Nyah's brother, Thoung Oo, said:

“My brother was an outgoing kid who loved to be outside biking and playing with his friends and family. Our parents and grandparents did not flee war and corrupt military to be persecuted by American police.

“My brother was returning home from an eighth grade graduation barbecue. He has never gotten in trouble with law enforcement before. He was a good kid. The UPD video cam, the witness testimonies, and stories they told my family don't add up, especially when they told my parents (who don't speak English at all) that there was a shootout. We need answers. In the body cam, we could hear an officer saying, ‘Why did he shoot?’”



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