

Protests follow LAPD shooting of homeless man on Skid Row

By Kevin Martinez
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About 200 protesters marched Tuesday morning from Los Angeles' Skid Row, the scene where an unarmed homeless man was shot to death on Sunday by several police officers, to LAPD's downtown headquarters. The demonstrators packed the Los Angeles Police Commission's weekly meeting to protest the man's killing and other cases of police brutality by the LAPD against the homeless.

Protestors beat drums and blew whistles all along the march with many chanting, "You can't kill all of us, you can't kill Africa." Africa was the nickname of the man killed by police. The meeting was packed to capacity, with many people watching the meeting in a spillover room.

LAPD Chief Charlie Beck, who was criticized by protesters during the meeting, said he had "not felt the same animosity" from the audience as he had at other public meetings and that the protesters did not represent the "universal opinion in the city of Los Angeles." He added, "But I will say, that group today was pretty irate."

Beck's comments follow the pattern of similar remarks made by police officials in New York and Missouri, whereby peaceful protests against police brutality are being demonized. In fact, police officials in Los Angeles were at great pains to not draw any comparisons between Sunday's killing and better-known police murders in Ferguson or Staten Island.

Police Commission President Steve Soboroff told the meeting, "This is a different tragedy than the incidents in Ferguson and the incidents in New York," adding, "LAPD is not the same force." One woman shouted from the audience, "It's worse!"

The LAPD announced in a statement that the department's Force Investigative Division will launch

an investigation in complicity with the LAPD's office of the Inspector General. Their findings will be reported to the Police Commission, a civilian panel that ostensibly oversees the police department. The purpose of such an "investigation" will be to absolve the officers of any wrongdoing and place the blame on the deceased. The officers who murdered the homeless man, known to friends as "Africa", have so far not been identified and have been placed on paid leave.

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, the victim has been identified through public records as Charley Saturmin Robinet, a 39-year-old French immigrant who served time for a bank robbery in 2000. The *Times* had a provocative headline entitled, "Man shot dead by LAPD was convicted bank robber," as if to justify his execution at the hands of police. Robinet had robbed a bank to pay for acting classes at the Beverly Hills Playhouse and was sentenced to 15 years in prison, but was released to a federal halfway house in May of 2014.

Federal court records show that Robinet suffered from an unspecified mental illness. In July 2003, a psychiatrist from the Federal Medical Center in Minnesota said he had a "mental disease or defect for which he requires treatment." Many of the homeless on Skid Row are mentally ill and are essentially dumped there after jail or mental health facilities can no longer cope with them.

On Monday, Police Chief Beck claimed that body cameras worn by officers during the shooting gave him a "unique perspective" on what happened during the confrontation but that the footage would not be made public. He stated, "If there is a criminal proceeding in this or if there's a civil proceeding in this, we will make all evidence available through those proceedings." In other words, if no charges are brought

against officers, the footage will not be made public.

Meanwhile, the man who took footage of the shooting on his cell phone told CNN that he did not see Robinet grab for the police officer's gun, the explanation given by police for shooting him. Anthony Blackburn told CNN he could not understand why half a dozen police officers could not subdue one man, asking why they simply didn't "shoot the man in the leg? He's already on the ground." When a CNN reporter asked Blackburn if he saw Robinet reach for the police officer's gun, Blackburn replied in the negative.

The video, which can still be seen on YouTube in its entirety, had been seen by millions of people before it was removed from Facebook.

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