

Videos show recent beatings committed by Mesa, Arizona, police officers

By Matthew Verhoven
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Two separate instances of police brutality in Mesa, Arizona, involving three victims and at least seven officers came to light last week in reports by the Associated Press and local news station KTAR.

Police body camera footage shows a May 17 incident in which police officers trained their rifles on two African American teenagers, a 15-year-old boy and a 16-year-old girl, as they were arrested on suspicion of robbing a nearby convenience store with a .22 caliber sawed-off rifle.

Video shows officers force the boy's arms into a stress position as he is interrogated by an officer asking him to give them a gun. He repeatedly shouts, "No gun!" though the officer presses on with the impromptu interrogation. The video then depicts the boy on the pavement with the officer's boot on his neck. A gun was recovered by the police nearby, but they did not find any weapons in the boy's possession.

Two officers have been placed on paid leave pending investigation. They, along with the two young teenagers, remain unnamed.

In a separate incident less than a week later on May 23, five officers were caught on a surveillance camera as well as police body cams punching Robert Johnson, 33, repeatedly, in the face.

Johnson, who is African American, was attacked after being stopped as police were investigating an attempted break-in nearby. A woman had claimed her ex-boyfriend had tried to enter her apartment. After refusing to sit down at the behest of officer Jhonte Jones, who is also African American, Johnson was assaulted by Jones and two other officers. Two more officers emerge from an elevator and join in the attack on Johnson. After the beating, Johnson was arrested and charged with disorderly conduct and hindering prosecution.

Five officers have been placed on paid leave in connection with this incident: William Abbiatti, Ernesto Calderon, Robert Gambiae, Jhonte Jones and Rudy Monarrez.

In both cases those officers fingered as responsible did not act alone. Perhaps most damning is the footage of two officers stepping off the elevator and encountering a chaotic scene in which Johnson is being repeatedly punched by Jones. Instead of pulling the out-of-control officer off the man, they join in the fray. In the video depicting the arrest of the two unnamed teenagers, there are multiple officers seen in addition to the two suspended pending investigation.

In a press conference Friday, Police Chief Ramon Batista claimed that incidents such as these "would not be tolerated." He announced that there would be two investigations, independent of each other, firstly, one by former Maricopa County attorney Rick Romley and an "independent" investigation by the Police Executive Research Forum, a nonprofit advocacy group representing the interests of police chiefs and other police executives.

While feigning anger and disappointment during the press conference announcing the investigation, Batista's decision to enlist the former county prosecutor and a nakedly pro-cop organization to determine whether the police officers behaved incorrectly guarantees a whitewash.

Mesa Police Department officers' use of brutality and excessive violence is notorious—their ranks include Philip Brailsford, who executed Daniel Shaver in 2016. The department's issues are just a microcosm of the nature of policing across the nation.

As of May 31, at least 524 people had been murdered by police nationwide, according to killedbypolice.net. Despite years of popular protests demanding an end to

police violence and repeated promises of reform, more than three lives on average are claimed every day by police violence while countless more continue to be wounded and maimed.

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