Notes on police violence in America

Off-duty Louisiana police officer shoots 14-year-old in the head

By Aaron Murch
27 April 2020

A university police officer in Metairie, Louisiana, critically wounded a 14-year-old boy after shooting him in the head early in the morning on April 17. The boy, who has not been publicly identified, survived the shooting but remains in a local hospital in critical condition.

The officer, identified on Wednesday as William Daniel Short, who was off duty at the time, was apparently awakened by noises outside his home in the New Orleans suburb of Metairie last Friday morning at around 3 a.m.

Short told detectives that he went outside with his gun when he heard an alarm going off. There he saw three teens by his car. After an altercation the three teens ran off. It is then that Short claims he thought he saw a muzzle flash and quickly responded by firing a single shot hitting the young boy in the head.

Police investigators claim that Short apparently mistook a cell phone lighting up in the teen’s hand for a muzzle flash. It was later revealed that the flash on his phone was a notification feature of an incoming phone call.

Jefferson Parish Sheriff Joseph Lopinto gave a press conference soon after the incident describing the altercation but declined to answer as to whether Short, who works on the police force of Southern University at New Orleans, had been arrested for the shooting.

According to Lopinto, Short “was not acting as a police officer in this situation,” and he would be treated as both a “victim and as a suspect.” No charges have yet been filed.

The other teens who were later questioned told the police they had snuck out in the night to go on a joyride in one of their parent’s cars. It was when they decided to park the car and get out that the alarm went off and woke up the off-duty police officer.

For his part Lopinto stated that regardless of what happened the youths should not have been out in the first place, “Good, bad or indifferent, no matter what, we had several juveniles that were out at 3:00 in the morning when they shouldn’t have been out,” said Lopinto. The other boys involved in the incident have been interviewed, but no arrests were made.

Responding to a welfare check, police in Albuquerque, New Mexico, tase and shoot man to death

Albuquerque police recently release body cam footage showing the fatal shooting of an unarmed man last month.

On March 30 two police officers tased and shot to death 52-year-old Valente Acosta-Bustillos while responding to a call for a welfare check. Acosta, who was holding a shovel and doing yard work when the police approached, had been out of contact with his family for days. Fearing for his safety, his daughter called the Albuquerque police department to do a check-up on him.

When police arrived they ran his name and found a warrant for his arrest. The footage shows the initially calm interaction between Acosta and the two officers. When they return to attempt to arrest Acosta is when he runs inside his home with the shovel in hand.

In a matter of seconds between being told to drop the shovel Acosta is tased and then shot three times. After barricading himself in his bathroom he can be heard screaming for a few minutes before going silent. When the officers eventually searched Acosta he was
unarmed, only a shovel in his hands.

The footage is currently being examined closely in an investigation on the incident and the actions of the officers. No arrests have been made nor have charges have been filed.

US Justice Department officials are currently carrying out oversight of the APD as the result a court-ordered settlement reached during the Obama administration. Justice Department attorney Corey Sanders told local journalists that he has been trying to get an adequate explanation from the police department on the officers’ actions that day,

“It seemed like the individual who had the shovel when he approached the officer, he seemed to be lucid. He didn’t seem to be a threat. He didn’t seem violent,” Sanders told the Albuquerque Journal. “I’m trying to take it frame by frame and trying to understand how this thing escalated.”

Texas police shoot and kill unarmed man fleeing in vehicle

Police officers responding to a call of alleged drug use Friday night in southeast Austin, Texas, approached a man later identified as 42-year-old Michael Ramos while he was in his car with a female companion.

Ramos, following the officer’s commands initially got out of his car and placed his hands above his head. According to the officer at the scene, Ramos then became unresponsive to police demands. It was then when one officer fired a non-lethal “beanbag” round at Ramos.

Ramos then got back in his car and sped away. Soon after the other officer at the scene fired a lethal round from his rifle into the car striking Ramos and killing him.

Austin Police Chief Brian Manley held a press conference to review what happened, justifying the killing and saying that the officers responding to the call were told Ramos may have been armed and that the vehicle resembled one used previously in a crime.

Residents are calling for an investigation claiming that the shooting was unnecessary and unwarranted. A protest was held Saturday calling for the resignation of Manley, claiming that the incident was racially motivated since Ramos was Hispanic.

The Austin Justice Coalition held a press conference as well where the coalition founder Chas Moore explained that the shooting was unjustified and likely motivated by racial hatred, “In spite of a pandemic that is pausing the entire world, racism and police brutality continue to persist.”

Whatever the motivations of the individual officers involved, it is clear from the details which are known that Ramos—as is the case of most of the more than 1,000 people killed every year in the US by the police—was a poor, working class man killed by an egregious use of lethal force.