

Protests erupt over whitewash of police murder of Breonna Taylor in Kentucky

By Niles Niemuth
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Protests erupted in Louisville, Kentucky on Wednesday following the announcement that a grand jury impaneled by the state attorney general, Daniel Cameron, had decided not to bring criminal charges against police officers for shooting and killing Breonna Taylor, a twenty-six-year-old African American emergency medical technician. Taylor was felled by multiple bullets during a police raid on her home in the early morning hours of March 13.

Anger over Taylor's killing—along with the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25—has fueled months of multi-racial protests across the US and internationally demanding an end to police violence and racism.

Hundreds of demonstrators took to the streets of Louisville as soon as Cameron, who served as a special prosecutor in the case, announced the grand jury's decision at an afternoon press conference. Soon after, phalanxes of riot police waded into the crowd of peaceful protesters, swinging clubs and carrying out multiple arrests.

Already on Monday, Democratic Governor Andy Beshear had declared a state of emergency in Louisville and ordered a lockdown of the downtown business area, enforced with the aid of concrete barricades set up by the police. By Wednesday, Beshear had activated the Kentucky National Guard and Louisville Mayor Greg Fisher, also a Democrat, had imposed a 72-hour curfew from 9 pm to 6:30 am, beginning Wednesday night.

In the weeks following the murder of George Floyd, hundreds of thousands marched and demonstrated in a wave of protests that spread to small towns as well as big cities. Louisville has remained a center of anti-police violence protests.

Thousands have been arrested in violent crackdowns by police, who have assaulted and detained journalists and fired countless rounds of tear gas, pepper balls and rubber bullets. Two protestors were killed by a right-wing militia member in Kenosha, Wisconsin last month during protests over the police shooting of Jacob Blake.

President Donald Trump has hailed the police violence against demonstrators and incited violent attacks on protesters by far-right and fascist elements, including armed militia groups. His Department of Homeland Security sent federal police and paramilitary forces into Portland and Seattle to lead the crackdown on protesters in those cities. Trump has defended the targeted assassination of anti-fascist protester Michael Reinohl by a police squad led by US Marshals.

One of the officers involved in the fatal shooting of Taylor,

Sergeant Jon Mattingly, sent an email to his colleagues that was leaked to the media on Monday. The email encouraged his fellow cops to confront protestors and hailed the police as “warriors.”

Elsewhere, Democratic Governor J.B. Pritzker announced that the Illinois National Guard had been placed on a “state of readiness” ahead of Wednesday's announcement in the Louisville case.

Hundreds of people gathered at a park near downtown Louisville Wednesday afternoon to listen to Cameron's announcement on the grand jury's decision. They began marching immediately after it became clear that none of the police officers involved would face trial over Taylor's death.

While police were arresting protestors and trundling them into waiting vans, they allowed heavily armed right-wing militia members to march and harass motorists.

Wednesday's grand jury decision came after 119 consecutive days of protests in Louisville, sparked by the release of the 911 recording of Taylor's boyfriend Kenneth Walker pleading for help as Taylor lay dying on the floor of her home, having been struck by six police bullets.

Detective Brett Hankison is the only officer involved in the raid that led to Taylor's killing to face criminal prosecution. Cameron announced that the grand jury had charged Hankison with “wanton endangerment” of Taylor's neighbors. During the raid on Taylor's apartment, Hankison blindly fired 10 bullets through a patio window, several of which entered another unit in the apartment building where a man, his pregnant wife and their five-year-old child were asleep.

Hankison was booked Wednesday and immediately released on a \$15,000 cash bond while awaiting trial. If convicted, he faces a maximum of 15 years in prison. His attorney told local NBC News affiliate WXIX that he plans to plead not guilty to the charges. “I don't think the evidence will support the charge,” attorney Stew Matthews said.

Hankison was fired by the Louisville Metro Police Department in June for displaying “an extreme indifference to the value of human life.” None of the bullets that he sprayed into the apartment hit Taylor.

Jon Mattingly and Myles Cosgrove, the two officers who fired the fusillade of 22 bullets that killed Taylor and wounded her boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, have been on administrative reassignment since the shooting, but have faced no punishment within the department. Their fatal shooting of Taylor has now

been ruled justified under the law. The rationale is that Walker fired first, striking Officer Mattingly in the leg.

The decision by the grand jury to not charge the officers for killing Taylor is a whitewash, overseen by Cameron, who is African American and a rising star within the Republican Party. He was elected attorney general in 2019 on a law-and-order platform.

Cameron spoke at the Republican National Convention last month, which was a non-stop attack on “socialist” and “anarchist” protesters, demonized as terrorists and arsonists, and a glorification of the police. Trump presented himself as the leader of a twilight struggle to defend “American civilization” against a socialist menace that controlled the Democratic Party and its candidate, Joe Biden.

The convention included thinly veiled appeals to racism, including a video statement by the St. Louis, Missouri couple who had pointed guns at anti-police violence protestors. They warned that Biden and the Democrats wanted to destroy the suburbs by flooding them with outsiders.

The fact that Cameron spoke at this fascistic event while serving as special prosecutor in the police killing of Taylor should itself have led to his dismissal from the investigation.

During his press conference Wednesday, Cameron denounced those who sought “mob justice” and dismissed the outrage of “celebrities and influencers” who were supposedly ignorant of Kentucky law.

Cameron said the police were carrying out a “knock and announce” warrant—rather than a no-knock warrant as had been widely reported. He said they had announced themselves before using a battering ram to burst into Taylor’s apartment after midnight, where they found Walker already in a shooting stance with Taylor next to him.

Cameron claimed that Walker almost immediately fired his gun. All three officers then opened fire on the apartment. According to Cameron, only one of the six bullets that struck Taylor was fatal, but state investigators could not determine which officer fired it, meaning they could not ascribe blame. He also claimed that since Walker opened fire first, the officers were acting in self-defense and therefore manslaughter charges could not be brought.

None of the officers were wearing body cameras, meaning that Cameron based his account of the shooting on the testimony of the three officers, which, he said, had been corroborated by one resident of the apartment, who claimed that he heard the officers announce themselves.

Walker and the 11 other residents of the apartment building all say they never heard the police announce themselves.

Walker, who had a legal permit for his gun, filed a lawsuit against the city of Louisville and the police department for damages earlier this month, claiming that he was the victim of police misconduct. While it took months to investigate and ultimately exonerate the police who killed Taylor, Walker was arrested and charged with first-degree assault and attempted murder of a police officer within hours of the raid. The charges were eventually dropped with prejudice, meaning they could be pursued again if prosecutors choose to do so. Walker is still seeking immunity from prosecution.

“I am a legal gun owner and I would never knowingly shoot a police officer,” Walker said at a press conference on September 1. He said he believed he was acting in self-defense, confronted by a group of unidentified men invading the apartment. “Breonna and I did not know who was banging at the door, but police know what they did,” he told the press.

The outcome of Cameron’s investigation and the grand jury decision is blanket immunity for police who burst into a home in the middle of the night. The decision makes clear that Taylor’s life meant nothing to the state. If confused or frightened residents act to defend themselves, they and their family can be blasted away.

Police in the United States already kill with almost complete impunity. Officers are charged and convicted in only the rarest of cases, despite killing approximately 1,000 people every year. The Supreme Court has routinely upheld and expanded the policy of qualified immunity, which gives police great leeway in the use of violence when on the beat.

The police are the armed enforcers of the capitalist state. While racism plays a role in police killings, contributing to the disproportionate number of African Americans and other minorities who fall victim to police brutality, the largest number of those who are killed are white.

Police violence is a class issue. The never-ending wave of police attacks and killings is a function of a social system that condemns millions to poverty while concentrating ever more obscene levels of wealth in the hands of a parasitic elite.

The implementation of cosmetic reforms and the placement of more minorities and women in positions of power has done nothing to ease the reign of police terror against the working class all across the country.

The only way to end police violence is to put an end to the capitalist system, which is the root of all the social ills confronting the working class, and establish a system based on social equality, that is, socialism.

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