

Judge Clears Killer Cop in 2012 Cleveland, Ohio Shooting

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A Cleveland, Ohio police officer who stood on the hood of a car and shot two occupants fifteen times following a 2012 chase was cleared of manslaughter charges by an Ohio judge Saturday. The ruling marks yet another expression of official support for police violence and terror by the political establishment, and sends a clear signal that police officers who carry out murders will not be held to account for their crimes.

The ruling acquitted Officer Michael Brelo of manslaughter charges stemming from the deaths of Timothy Russell, 43, and Malissa Williams, 30, who were killed on November 29, 2012, after police officers fired more than 130 rounds into their car.

Forty-nine of those shots were fired by Brelo, a former Marine who had served in Iraq, who jumped onto the hood of the car and shot the occupants directly through the windshield.



The windshield of the victims' car [Credit: Ohio Attorney General's Office]

Hundreds of people took part in protests after the ruling, including about two hundred people who gathered at the park where 12-year-old Tamir Rice was shot and killed by a Cleveland police officer six months ago. City and county police in full riot gear poured onto the streets; overnight 71 protestors were arrested with many more beaten and pepper sprayed.

Both Russell and Williams were homeless, suffered from mental health problems, and were struggling with drug addictions. Police claim that they attempted to pull the car over for a traffic violation and began chasing it when it pulled away. The chase ended when police

rammed the vehicle and unleashed a hail of bullets.

Sixty-two police cars participated in the pursuit. Russell's body was struck with 23 bullets and Williams's with 24. No gun was found on either of the victims and they did not try to hit police with their car.

All aspects of the subsequent legal proceeding, including the actions of both the district attorney and the judge, were conducted to ensure that there would be no serious consequences for a wanton murder carried out by what was in effect a police lynch mob. The District Attorney only indicted one officer, even though at least twelve others took part in the shooting, while a total of seventy-five officers were administratively disciplined in connection with the event.

In his ruling, Judge John P. O'Donnell declared that Brelo could not be charged for the deaths of the two unarmed occupants of the car because it was impossible to prove that the bullets that killed the two victims came from Brelo's gun, or that the victims were not already dead when he jumped onto the hood. "The state did not prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant Michael Brelo knowingly caused the deaths of Timothy Russell and Malissa Williams," O'Donnell declared.

The ruling is a fraudulent travesty of justice, intended only to provide a pseudo-legal cover for the judge's predetermined goal of protecting the officers involved in the shooting. Despite hundreds of police killings throughout Ohio over the previous decade, this is only the second indictment of any of the officers involved, and there have been no convictions.

No charges have been brought against the two police officers who shot and killed 12-year-old Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio on November 22 of last year as he played with a toy gun in a park.

Nor have charges been filed against the police officers who murdered Tanisha Anderson on November 13. Anderson, who suffered from mental illness, was killed in front of her family, who had called 911 because she was having an episode and needed to be taken to the hospital. Instead of sending an ambulance, police officers handcuffed the woman and then slammed her head onto the concrete pavement, killing her.

The US government keeps no official tally on the number of people killed by the police, but by one unofficial count, 450 people have been killed by officers in 2015, putting this year on track to top last year's total of more than 1,100 deaths.

A study conducted by the *Washington Post* and researchers at Bowling Green State University found that despite the thousands of police killings over the previous 10 years, only 54 officers were indicted and only 13 were convicted, receiving mostly wrist-slap sentences.

Following the ruling, the Justice Department announced that it would conduct a civil rights investigation into the shooting. The numerous such investigations carried out by the Obama Justice Department, most notably into the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, have universally failed to result in charges against the officers involved.

In fact, the real sympathies of the White House were shown this week when Obama signed into law a bill establishing a so-called "Blue Alert" system to monitor social media for threats

against the police. Over the past year, dozens of people have been arrested for making online statements critical of the police, which law enforcement interpreted as threats.

Cleveland is a stunning example of the impoverishment of the working class resulting from decades of deindustrialization and attacks on social programs throughout the country.

The official poverty rate in the city is over 35 percent, while the poverty rate for children approaches 50 percent and is even higher in the poorest neighborhoods. The median household income is \$26,217, just a few thousand dollars above the official poverty threshold of \$23,850 for a family of four.

Hundreds of thousands of well-paying jobs in manufacturing sectors such as auto, steel, electronics and rubber were lost in the Cleveland area during the deindustrialization of the 1980s and 1990s. Over the past 15 years, manufacturing jobs continued to decline throughout Ohio, falling from over 1 million in 2000 to fewer than 350,000 in 2010.

The ongoing wave of police violence and repression is rooted in the collapse of working-class living standards and the staggering growth of social inequality in the US. Under these conditions, the police see themselves essentially as an occupying force whose aim is to oppress and intimidate an increasingly hostile population. In the case of Brelo, a former Marine, the homicidal methods used in the United States in the occupation of Iraq were brought home.

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