

No Charges in Madison, Wisconsin Police Killing of Unarmed Youth Tony Robinson, Jr.

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Global Research, May 13, 2015

[World Socialist Web Site](#)

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

Image: Tony Robinson, Jr.

Dane County, District Attorney Ismael Ozanne announced Tuesday afternoon that he would not bring criminal charges against the Madison, Wisconsin, police officer who shot and killed unarmed 19-year-old Tony Robinson, Jr. on March 6 of this year.

Nervously dabbing sweat from his face during his 30-minute statement, the DA told reporters that he had concluded that Matt Kenny used a “lawful amount of force” when he ended Robinson’s life.

The killing of Robinson sparked walkouts and protests by thousands of students and workers in the state capital. Kenny, who had previously shot and killed a mentally disturbed white man in 2007, was placed on paid administrative leave.

To prove his bona fides, Ozanne began the speech by referring to the fact that, like Tony Robinson, he is biracial, and that his African-American mother participated in the civil rights movement in the 1960s. He also drew attention to the fact that he is the first non-white DA in the history of the state.

“My decision will not bring Tony back. My decision will not end racial disparities that exist in our criminal justice system. My decision is not based on emotion. Rather, this decision is based on the facts as they’ve been investigated and reported to me—guided by rule of law and the oath I took to uphold the constitution of the United States and the state of Wisconsin,”

he said.

He then launched into an official account of the moments before Robinson’s killing. According to Ozanne, Kenny and other officers were responding to 911 calls reporting that Robinson had assaulted one of his friends and was assaulting pedestrians and disrupting traffic. The young man was apparently having a negative reaction to hallucinogenic mushrooms that he had ingested a short time before.

As Kenny arrived on the scene Robinson had already returned to his friend’s apartment. Ozanne reported that Kenny then entered the second floor flat through a door that had already been broken open by Robinson after he heard a disturbance.

According to Ozanne, the officer announced himself, after which Robinson allegedly rushed

the officer, hitting him in the face with his fist, knocking him back against the stairwell wall. As he retreated backward down the stairwell the officer opened fire seven times, emptying his gun into the unarmed Robinson, hitting him seven times. Robinson was pronounced dead at the hospital with bullet wounds in his head, torso, and right arm.

The family's attorney, John Loevy, questioned the DA's accounting of the event, highlighting video evidence that reportedly shows the police officer firing the seventh and final shot which killed Robinson from outside the house. Loevy also stated that Kenny was warned by dispatchers not to pursue Robinson and unnecessarily escalated the situation.

The district attorney concluded his news conference Tuesday by quoting Martin Luther King, Jr as a warning to those who might protest his decision, encouraging them to instead turn their anger and frustration back into the electoral system. "I am reminded that true and lasting change does not come from violence but from exercising our voices and our votes," he stated. "The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said 'violence brings only temporary change, violence by creating many more social problems than it solves never brings permanent peace.'"

Ozanne's remarks gave expression to the deep concern amongst the ruling elite about growing social opposition, especially in the wake of mass protests against the killing of Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Maryland, where the National Guard was deployed for a week in order to suppress popular anger.

Police officers were mobilized in advance of the DA's news conference to respond to any spontaneous protests in response to his decision. Several hundred protestors holding banners which read "#JusticeforTony" and "Black Lives Matter" marched on the State Capitol building Tuesday evening. The protest organization Young Gifted and Black has called for students to walk out of school Wednesday to protest the decision not to bring charges.

Robinson was just one of more than 100 people killed by the police across the United States in March. According to killedbypolice.net Robinson was the 192nd person killed by police since the beginning of 2015, and since his death another 227 people have been killed as the result of an encounter with the police.

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