

Memphis Cops Indicted in the Beating Death of Tyre Nichols

Brutal execution fully captured in police video camera mounted on neighborhood pole

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Five African American Memphis police officers assigned to the notorious special unit known as the Scorpions, have been charged with second-degree murder and other crimes which resulted in the death of 29-year-old Tyre Nichols.

Nichols, also an African American, was driving to his home in the Hickory Hill neighborhood where he was stopped by the police on January 7.

In response to the public outcry in Memphis, five officers were terminated from their jobs on January 20. One week later, indictments were handed down as the Memphis police released several video versions of the horrendous beating of Nichols.

After the indictments were issued and an announcement was made by the City of Memphis that the video recordings would be released on January 27, demonstrations against police brutality were called in various cities across the United States. Memphis Police Chief C.J. Davis has attempted to distance herself from the actions of the police and the brutally exercised by the Scorpions.

Hundreds of people protested the brutal killing in Memphis. People blocked Highway 55 which tied up traffic during the same evening that the indictments were announced.

In an interview with the Commercial Appeal, [Davis said that](#):

"It doesn't matter what color officers are their race or ethnicity. It doesn't matter, what their religious beliefs are. Anyone that wears a uniform and violates the rights of our community members needs to be dealt with swiftly.... I want them to know that we as police officers are not above the law. And that in this organization, I plan to hold all of our officers accountable. I plan to do whatever we have to do to build our relationship

with our community.”

Shelby County District Attorney Steve J. Mulroy, who brought the criminal indictments against the five officers, Tadarrius Bean, Demetrius Haley, Emmitt Martin III, Desmond Mills, Jr. and Justin Smith, were charged in addition to second-degree murder, with aggravated assault, aggravated kidnapping, official misconduct and official oppression. The DA said his office met with the family of Nichols before the charges were filed.

Image: Tyre Nichols mother speak out against the police murder of her son (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)



Mulroy emphasized in a press conference that the investigation into the incident and the prosecutorial decision against the cops were expedited “because of the extraordinary nature of the case. The actions of all of them resulted in the death of Tyre Nichols and they are all responsible,” Mulroy noted.

Other developments indicate that more police officers could face disciplinary action and prosecution. The Shelby County Sheriff’s Office announced on January 27 that two of its deputies have been placed on administrative leave pending the outcome of an internal investigation into their conduct during the beating of Nichols.

Yet despite such proclamations, incidents of police brutality are continuing to occur in Memphis and across the U.S. The city has a long and sordid history of mistreatment and misconduct by the police against the African American community in Memphis.

Police claim that Nichols was stopped because he was “driving recklessly”. This motorist appeared to be calm when asking the police why he was being pulled over.

Bodycam videos released from the police are the only ones which contain audio. The pole camera footage does not have sound.

The Scorpion agents immediately escalated the situation causing Nichols to flee after he was tased and pepper sprayed. He was later apprehended several blocks away where the serious blows to his body were inflicted and the medical neglect is documented through the video hoisted on a pole in the neighborhood.

The most revealing and damning video recording of the incident was portrayed from the pole camera. From the elevated level, any observer can see the full force of the brutality carried out against Nichols.

This young man was tased, pepper sprayed, punched in the face, kicked at least three times

to the head, struck repeatedly with a police baton and slammed on to the street where the officers exerted pressure on him while he was already subdued. Later what appeared to be two paramedics appeared on the scene yet waited an extended period of time before they administered any care to Nichols.

Finally, after more than a half-hour, an ambulance arrived to carry Nichols to a hospital. The police involved were captured in their own video bodycams making excuses for the brutal attack.

Two employees of the Memphis Fire Department have been placed on administrative leave for their part in the incident. Nichols, severely beaten and denied immediate medical attention, died three days later on January 10 in the hospital having suffered serious injuries to the head and brain.

In the videos which were released on January 27 they clearly show more than five officers on the scene of the beating. These additional officers did absolutely nothing to deescalate the situation or provide assistance to the victim.

What Are the Scorpions?

This specialized policing unit was formed during 2021 ostensibly to crackdown on crimes such as car theft, robberies, drug trafficking, gang activity and homicides. The full name of the unit is Street Crimes Operation to Restore Peace in Our Neighborhoods (Scorpion).

However, judging from the release of the videos documenting the brutal beating of Nichols along with other complaints, the Scorpions are functioning as a mechanism which has caused tremendous trauma, fear and hatred in the city of Memphis. With the release of the videos illustrating the beating of Nichols, the unit has now come under official scrutiny.

[An NBC News report](#) on the Scorpion unit said of its launching:

“Memphis’ Scorpion unit was created in October 2021 under the police department’s Organized Crime Unit. Made up of 40 officers divided into four 10-member teams, the unit was tasked not only with addressing violent crime, but also with investigating car thefts and gangs. The officers’ ‘crime suppression’ assignments changed depending on where crime was worst.... Mayor Jim Strickland promoted the new Scorpion unit as part of the solution in his January 2022 State of the City speech. He touted it as part of an anti-crime strategy that also included a gun violence intervention program and more money for the police department. In its first three months, Scorpion made hundreds of arrests and seized hundreds of cars and weapons, Strickland said.”

Community activists in Memphis are calling for the dismantling of the Scorpions. The unit searches for any pretext to pull over motorists and pedestrians. They often travel around certain neighborhoods in Memphis in unmarked vehicles.

These units operate under the assumption that routine traffic stops are means to arresting people on felony charges. There could be a rationale for utilizing African American officers in such a police unit since the theory is they can easily blend in with the community making their law-enforcement tactics more entrapping and insidious.

Police Killings of Civilians Rise Across the U.S.

During 2022, the number of people killed by police increased over previous years. It has only been efforts by select newspapers and research institutes which have attempted to document the number of incidents involving lethal force.

During 2020 in the aftermath of the police killings of Breonna Taylor in Louisville, the vigilante murder of Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia and the choking to death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, mass demonstrations and urban rebellions erupted throughout the U.S. and internationally. Former U.S. President Donald Trump evoked the slave-era Insurrection Act of the early 19th century demanding that law-enforcement agents dominate the streets. Trump ordered federal agents and troops into major cities where demonstrations against police brutality were taking place.

Democratic President Joe Biden rode the wave of popular discontent with the police in 2020 which played a major role in the electoral defeat of Trump. However, after being elected and failing to pass the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act during 2021, Biden in his 2022 State of Union Address repudiated the mass slogan to “Defund the Police” saying that more money was needed for law-enforcement as the numbers of people arrested, framed, beaten and killed by police are increasing.

[An article published by the Guardian](#) newspaper on January 6 reports:

“Police across the country killed an average of more than three people a day, or nearly 100 people every month last year according to Mapping Police Violence. The non-profit research group maintains a database of reported deaths at the hands of law enforcement, including people fatally shot, beaten, restrained and Tasered. The preliminary 2022 total – a possible undercount as more cases are catalogued – marks 31 additional fatalities than the year before. In 2021, police killed 1,145 people; 1,152 in 2020; 1,097 in 2019; 1,140 in 2018; and 1,089 in 2017. The earliest data goes back to 2013, when journalists and racial justice advocates began counting these fatal incidents on a national basis. A database run by the Washington Post, which tracks fatal shootings by police, also shows 2022 as a year with record killings.”

These statistics will not improve under the current system of institutional racism, national oppression and economic exploitation in the U.S. No amount of rhetoric related to “better training and police reform” can resolve the problem. Only the dismantling of the present system of law-enforcement and criminal justice can bring genuine due process and social stability to African Americans and other people of color communities who are the disproportionate victims of police violence and mass incarceration.

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Featured image: Memphis demonstration against police brutality (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)

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