



Alton Sterling: “Gentle Giant” or Armed Felon?

When police officers attempted to arrest Alton Sterling (shown) just after midnight on Tuesday for brandishing a firearm and threatening a homeless man, he resisted arrest and fought with the officers. Before it was over, he was dead and the nation was — again — embroiled in protests and violence as the mainstream media, social media, and social justice warriors decried the shooting as the “murder” of a “good man.”



A [video](#) showing the shooting was posted to various websites immediately after the shooting. The next day, [another video](#) was released showing the incident more closely and from a slightly different angle. Both videos show Sterling fighting with police and refusing to obey orders to stop moving. As the officers try to subdue Sterling, one of them can be heard shouting “He’s got a gun! Gun!” Both officers drew their guns and one can be heard on the video saying, “If you f***ing move, I swear to God...” But before he can finish that statement, the other officer — the one pinning Sterling’s legs — is heard saying, “He’s going for the gun!”

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One of the officers shoots three times and then both videos lose the frame. The second video shows the officers being thrown off of Sterling and from off-camera one yells, “Get on the ground!” There are two more shots, followed by one final shot. The video pans back to the incident, and one officer is seen walking over and removing a gun from Sterling’s right front pocket.

An autopsy said Sterling was killed by shots to the chest and back. Immediately, the mainstream media picked up the story of two white officers killing a black man. Social media exploded with cries of racism and excessive force and calls for the death of all cops, especially white cops.

While many in the mainstream media and social media have said this shooting was racially motivated, there is nothing known so far that supports that conclusion. It is a strange way of thinking to assume that because the officers were white and the man who was killed was black that it *must* be because of racism. After all, if it is racist to assume something negative about someone based only on the color of their skin, doesn’t that also apply when judging these officers? To assume they must be racists because they are white is a self-defeating idiocy.

Since some social justice warriors have decided to use the death of Sterling to call for the death of all white police officers — [a call that was answered in Dallas](#) — perhaps it would be worthwhile to take a look at what is known about him.

Alton Sterling has been described as a “gentle giant” by his aunt, who [told](#) CNN after watching the second video, “I didn’t see a gun. I saw a phone come out [of] his pocket. That’s what I saw, a phone. I don’t think he had a gun.” The mother of some of Sterling’s children [described](#) him as “a man who simply tried to earn a living to take care of his children” and referred to the officers as “the individuals involved in his murder.” She went on to say that Sterling “was not bothering anyone.” Others — including the convenience store owner who made the second video of the shooting — have offered



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on July 9, 2016

similar portrayals of Sterling.

According to the narrative, two white police officers summarily murdered a peaceful citizen who was just minding his own business while earning a paycheck so he could take it home to his family. Whether the policemen involved committed murder (as many claim), or instead acted within the law out of genuine concern for their own lives, is something to be decided through due process in a court of law, based upon all of the evidence including the videos. It should not be decided by violence in the streets. Nor should not be used as a rationale for targeting and killing police officers. But there is no doubt that the portrayal of Sterling as a “gentle giant” — a portrayal that is helping to fuel the anger against police — is flawed.

While there is still much that is not known, what is known is that Sterling had a [long criminal record](#) ranging from violent crimes (including domestic battery, robbery, illegal possession of a firearm, and armed assault), to drug dealing, to failure to pay child support, to carnal knowledge of a juvenile for impregnating a 14-year-old girl when he was 20. For that crime he was sentenced to five years hard labor, although the sentence was suspended on the condition that he honor his probation agreement and register as a sex offender. He did not keep those conditions and was subsequently sentenced to two and a half years in prison. Upon his release, he was added to the [sex offender registry](#). He had been in and out of jail for more than half of his life.

Sterling was well known to local police as a dangerous criminal. In one previous altercation with an officer, he refused a pat-down and fought with the officer. During the fight, a loaded pistol fell from his pocket. That officer managed to subdue Sterling and secure the weapon without further incident. Sterling apparently did not learn from that incident, since in his last encounter with police he was illegally armed (felons can't legally own guns) and fought with the officers.

So, let's put the “gentle giant” narrative to rest. He may have been a “giant,” but he was not gentle — he had been convicted of robbery, domestic battery, and illegal gun possession while in possession of drugs (he entered a plea bargain to have a charge of possession of an illegal firearm while in possession of drugs with intent to distribute dismissed). He was indeed “bothering” someone the night police attempted to arrest him — unless threatening a homeless man with a gun isn't considered a “bother.” He also may not have been as good father or provider as has been claimed — he owed over \$26,000 in child support when he died. He was not a “good man” — good men don't have sex with children. Of course, these particulars in no way justify killing someone. But they do put in a different light the way Sterling has been held up as a “poster child” for social justice.

An investigation of the shooting of Alton Sterling is certainly in order. That investigation should not be swayed by the court of public opinion, by violence or the threat of violence, or by false narratives intended to emotionally sway public opinion, but by the actual evidence in the case — including the evidence that Sterling was armed (as seen in video), resisting arrest, and not complying with the police when ordered not to move.



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