



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on May 3, 2017

DOJ Clears Baton Rouge Officers in Alton Sterling Shooting Death

After almost a year of investigation, the U.S. Department of Justice says it will not charge the two Baton Rouge police officers who fatally shot Alton Sterling in the early hours of July 5, 2016. The shooting death of 37-year-old Sterling (shown) — who was black — by two white officers sparked riots and police killings and a federal investigation. With that investigation coming to a close without an indictment, it is anyone's guess whether more violence will follow under the Black Lives Matter (BLM) banner.



The *Washington Post* [reported](#) Tuesday that the Justice Department would be announcing the close of the probe within 24 hours and that the officers would not be charged:

The Justice Department has decided not to bring charges against the officers involved in the death of Alton Sterling, whose videotaped shooting by police in Baton Rouge last summer prompted unrest across the city, and is planning to reveal in the next 24 hours that it has closed the probe, according to four people familiar with the matter.

That announcement finally came late Wednesday afternoon. As *The Guardian* [reported](#):

A US attorney says there is not enough evidence to pursue federal charges against two white officers in the police shooting death of a black man in Baton Rouge.

US attorney Corey Amundson said Wednesday that the investigation into the death of Alton Sterling couldn't prove that the officers acted unreasonably and willfully.

The *Post* article includes two videos — one of Sterling's aunt, the other of the mother of some of Sterling's children — that paint a picture of a good man who was unceremoniously gunned down for the crime of being a black man. This is the same narrative that was so prevalent in the days after the shooting. It was dishonest then and it is dishonest now.

As this writer [said](#) at the time:

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 similar portrayals of Sterling.

That the *Post* is resurrecting that false narrative in the wake of the Justice Department's decision not to recommend indictment is disturbing. The last time that narrative got trotted out, the result was riots, looting, fires, and dead police officers from [Baton Rouge](#) to [Dallas](#).



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Besides, the known facts about both the shooting — as seen in not [one](#), but [two](#) videos — and the life of Alton Sterling simply do not support the narrative of an innocent man murdered by police which has been put forth by his friends and family and regurgitated by the mainstream media. Alton Sterling was not innocent and he was not murdered.

As this writer reported in that previous article, Sterling had [a long and violent criminal record](#) involving domestic battery, robbery, illegal possession of a firearm, armed assault, drug dealing, failure to pay child support, and carnal knowledge of a juvenile for impregnating a 14-year-old girl when he was 20. When he died, this “good daddy” was a registered sex offender who owed over \$26,000 in child support.

The altercation with police that ended his life in the wee hours between July 4 and July 5, 2016 began when he brandished a firearm at a homeless man while he was illegally selling CDs and DVDs. And it was not his first time being armed with a gun while fighting with police to avoid a pat-down. As this writer wrote after the shooting:

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.

Now that the Department of Justice has concluded its 10-month-long investigation and is prepared to clear the officers — Howie Lake and Blane Salamoni — of any wrongdoing in the shooting, the media and anti-police activist groups are stoking the fires of racial discord that previously erupted into violence. To make matters worse, the Justice Department — while having hinted that a decision was coming — had left Baton Rouge and the rest of the country in the dark on details and poised for the possibility of renewed violence. As the *Post* reported:

Local police and city officials have said this week that they believed a decision was imminent, but they and representatives for Sterling's family said they had not been told when an announcement from the Justice Department was coming. Some local schools have sent notes to parents informing them of action plans in case of major protests, and several local lawmakers have publicly called on the Justice Department to end the suspense.

“The Department of Justice's failure to communicate with the community has created angst and nervousness, and I fear carries the potential for increased tension between the community and law enforcement,” Rep. Cedric L. Richmond (D), whose congressional district includes part of Baton Rouge, wrote in a letter to Sessions on Friday. “It is inappropriate and against the interests of public safety . . . to allow this level of uncertainty to continue.”

With the official announcement now having been made, tensions in Baton Rouge and around the country are increasing. *The Guardian* [quoted](#) Rashad Robinson, executive director of Color of Change (which the news site described as “a racial justice activist group”) as saying, “There is no way to misinterpret the message that Jeff Sessions sent today: black lives do not matter.” Robinson went on to say, “There is no other way to read this decision from the Department of Justice, which issued no charges to the police officers who tased Alton Sterling, held him down on the ground, and shot him in the chest and back,” adding, “A black man who was selling CDs was summarily executed, and the attorney general sees nothing wrong with that.”

And while the officers are not completely out of the woods yet — the state is conducting its own



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investigation and could still elect to charge the officers — at least they will not be charged federally. John McLindon, Blane Salamoni's attorney, [told](#) the Associated Press that his client expressed relief:

He spoke to the officer Wednesday after the Justice Department announced its decision in the investigation of Alton Sterling's fatal shooting on July 5. He says the "stress of the unknown" has been hard on Salamoni and his family while they wait for the investigation to conclude.

McLindon says he can't discuss the evidence in the case due to a pending state investigation. But he expressed confidence state authorities also will rule out criminal charges against Salamoni and a second white police officer involved in the deadly confrontation.

Photo: Alton Sterling



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