



Milwaukee Shooting, Rioting: Why Are the Police Always Blamed?

Following a fatal police shooting of an armed black suspect Saturday afternoon, Milwaukee erupted into the requisite rioting and looting that has become the hallmark of lawlessness so common in the inner cities of America. As of this writing, at least six businesses including banks and gas stations have been burned, at least four police officers have been injured, and an unknown number of civilians — mostly white — have been attacked by mobs.



The violence and destruction only came under control when Milwaukee County Sheriff David Clarke called in the national guard. After speaking with Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker and Wisconsin National Guard Major General Donald Dunbar, Clarke made the decision to put the Guard on standby, saying, “We cannot allow for a repeat of what happened last night. I am going to utilize all available resources to accomplish that.”

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The tragedy which played out in the streets of Milwaukee began with a traffic stop in the crime-ridden North Side of the city at 3:30 p.m. on Saturday. As Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett explained in a press conference:

Police spotted a suspicious vehicle and they stopped the vehicle. As they stopped the vehicle, two individuals fled from the vehicle. One started heading west, another started heading east. A Milwaukee police officer with six years’ experience started chasing the individual who was running to the east.

That suspect, now identified by family members as 23-year-old Sylville Smith, had — in his hand — a handgun. The police officer chasing him ordered him to drop the gun. He raised it toward the officer. The officer — who has not been identified except to say that he is black, 24 years old, and has been on the force for six years (three of those as an officer) — shot Smith twice. Smith died at the scene. As Mayor Barnett said:

He ordered that individual to drop his gun. The individual did not drop his gun, held the gun, or I don’t know that for a fact, but had the gun with him. The officer shot several times. The individual was shot in the chest and once in the arm ... that individual who is a 23-year-old man has died. The officer was wearing a body-camera. It is my understanding that the body camera was operating.

The video from that camera has been reviewed and shows that Smith did, indeed, raise his gun toward the officer. The gun was found to have been stolen in a burglary in May. It was loaded with 23 rounds. The body camera video also confirms that the officer fired twice.

In a statement to the media, Police Chief Edward Flynn said that after watching the body camera footage, it was clear that Smith was raising the gun to point it at the officer. “It was in his hand. He was



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raising up with it," Chief Flynn said.

Every day in the inner cities of America, officers face these types of situations. Life and death hang in the balance and mere fractions of a second make all the difference. As Milwaukee Police Assistant Chief Bill Jessup said in a statement, "That officer had to make a split-second decision when the person confronted him with a handgun," adding, "This is a risk they take every day on behalf of our community."

And yet, even in these crime-ravaged areas all across the country, young people grow up and decide to enter police work. And then they are judged by the very people they are protecting their cities for (and from) for the life and death decisions they make in the time it takes for an armed criminal to raise a gun and point it at them.

Of course the people who hand out those harsh judgments while shouting that "black lives matter" never seem to stop to consider that the thin blue line is sometimes the only protection their communities have against the type of lawlessness, violence, and destruction that is typified by the rioting, looting, and burning that consumed much of their community Saturday night and Sunday.

It takes a special kind of ignorance for a "community" to seize upon the death of young criminal to burn down its own neighborhood. That ignorance is even worse when the death in question is that of a young man who gave a police officer no choice but to use lethal force.

Smith's mother, Mildred Haynes, told the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* that she is "lost" over the death of her son, whom she sees as a victim of the police. "My son is gone due to the police killing my son," she said, adding, "I am lost."

Mayor Barnett, in an effort to both quench the fires of violence engulfing the city and set the record straight, pointed out that the video is conclusive: Smith raised the gun toward the officer. But he was quick to add that the pain experienced by Smith's family is real. "A young man lost his life yesterday afternoon," he said, adding, "And no matter what the circumstances are, his family has to be hurting."

Those facts did little to change the minds of those who see the violence and destruction as a legitimate reaction to "oppression."

While one would expect the run-of-the-mill "Black Lives Matter" antagonists to seize upon that pain as an excuse for the violence and destruction in the North Side of Milwaukee, it is surprising to see a city alderman who lists "safe neighborhoods" as one of his "top priorities" spouting that pablum. Alderman Khalif Rainey said the riots, looting, and destruction are a "warning cry" by those "tired of living under" the "oppression" of the city of Milwaukee. He described the city as "the worst place to live for African-Americans in the entire country" and indicated that more violence will follow unless the city amends its oppressive ways:

This entire community has sat back and witnessed how Milwaukee has become the worst place to live for African-Americans in the entire country. Now this is a warning cry. Where do we go from here? Where do we go as a community from here?

You're one day away. The black people of Milwaukee are tired. They're tired of living under this oppression. This is their existence. This is their life. This is the life of their children.

Now what has happened tonight may have not been right; I'm not justifying that. But no one can deny the fact that there's problems, racial problems, here in Milwaukee, that have to be closely, not examined, but rectified. Rectify this immediately. Because if you don't, this vision of downtown, all



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of that, you're one day away. You're one day away.

While Alderman Rainey and Smith's mother are happy to place the blame on the city and its police officers, Smith's father, Patrick Smith, blames himself, guns, the police, and the city. In an interview with the local Fox affiliate, the elder Smith shared that he sees the ability to own guns as a type of white conspiracy:

Everyone playing their part in this city, blaming the white guy or whatever, and we know what they're doing. Like, already I feel like they should have never OK'd guns in Wisconsin. They already know what our black youth was doing anyway. These young kids gotta realize this is all a game with them. Like they're playing Monopoly. You young kids falling into their world, what they want you to do. Everything you do is programmed. I had to blame myself for a lot of things too because your hero is your dad and I played a very big part in my family's role model for them. Being on the street, doing things of the street life: Entertaining, drug dealing and pimping and they're looking at their dad like "he's doing all these things." I got out of jail two months ago, but I've been going back and forth in jail and they see those things so I'd like to apologize to my kids because this is the role model they look up to. When they see the wrong role model, this is what you get. They got us killing each other and when they even OK'd them pistols and they OK'd a reason to kill us too. Now somebody got killed reaching for his wallet, but now they can say he got a gun on him and they reached for it. And that's justifiable. When we allowed them to say guns is good and it's legal, we can bear arms. This is not the wild, wild west y'all.

The reality, though, is that the blame for the death of Sylville Smith lays squarely at his own feet. If he had not responded to the repeated order to drop the gun by raising it to point it at the officer, he would not have created the situation where the officer had to choose between his own life and Smith's. No one put that gun in his hand. No one forced him to run. No one compelled him to turn and try to take aim at the officer. And no one else is to blame.

Just don't expect those clear facts to get in the way of a "good" narrative. That narrative is that "racist" white society is to blame.

Photo of vehicle set on fire in Milwaukee: AP Images





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