

WHITEWASH IN ATHENS, PART 2

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Author: Donald E. Wilkes, Jr., Professor of Law, University of Georgia School of Law.

The whitewash in the police shooting of Edward Wright has now entered its second phase. The first phase occurred when the local DA issued his pitiful exculpation of everyone involved except Wright. The second phase occurred when the ACCPD investigated itself, the officer who shot Wright dead and the other officer who clubbed Wright, and found that all's right with the world and that the officers deserve no administrative sanction. The officer who fired six shots at Wright is now back on the job, the other officer is back on the job, no one has been or will be punished criminally or administratively, no one has been or will be disciplined or fired, and nothing more about the matter will be done by the government. Meanwhile, Edward Wright's punctured body lies in the grave. Is this justice?

The second whitewash is an 4-page "interdepartmental memorandum," dated April 15, 1996, written to the ACCPD police chief by five high-ranking cops and the county attorney. The six authors form what they euphemistically call an "Incident Review Panel" that supposedly "devoted many hours thoroughly reviewing" Internal Affairs Case No. 1995-20, i.e., the Wright shooting. (It would be interesting to know the facts and circumstances of the other 19 "investigations" of alleged police misconduct in 1995.)

One interesting feature of the report is that it reveals the alarming, ever-increasing propensity of the police to threaten and use force and violence against citizens. The police officer training procedures its refers to include "Officer Survival, Self Defense Techniques, Use of Force, Use of Chemical Agents, Use of Police Baton, and Use of Firearms." The report relies on lesson plans of the police academy and the policies and procedures of the ACCPD. Of course, since none of these documents or policies has been released to the public, it is difficult for the average person to independently determine whether applicable procedures were followed or whether those procedures are fair and reasonable.

The report also relies on an interview with the police academy instructor who taught the officers involved the techniques of "control and restraint." Of course, since the public is not told what the officers were taught or what the instructor said, it is again difficult for the ordinary citizen to judge the propriety of the teaching or the training. For all the public knows, that training may be teaching officers improper or unacceptable techniques.

It will be recalled that at the trial of the police who beat Rodney King one of the defense witnesses was an instructor from the LAPD police academy who testified under oath that what the officer-goons did there was perfectly acceptable and exactly what police officers were trained to do.

The April 15 report essentially accepts everything the officers involved claim as gospel truth. It does acknowledge that the cop who shot Wright had an unofficial, supposedly unloaded firearm in his patrol car and this was "a violation of [official ACCPD] policy." However, it does not

recommend any punishment for this violation; nor is there indication in the report that anything was done about this violation. Why? What was this weapon? Was there ammunition for this unofficial weapon? How many other police violate this policy? Is anything ever done about it?

Like the DA's report, the April 15 report fails to mention facts that might raise suspicions. For example, it omits the discrepancy between the size of the shooting officer (6'2," 220 lbs.) and the victim (Wright was 5'8", 155 lbs.). It says nothing about the officer's proficiency in the martial arts.

Like the DA's report, the April 15 report is not only conclusory and based on information not fully revealed to the public, but also leaves major questions about Wright's death unanswered. How far from the officer was Wright when he was shot? Were six shots necessary? Were some of Wright's injuries defensive wounds? What happened to the .40 caliber police bullets never found? Did the shooting endanger third persons? How far away were other vehicles and houses when the shots were fired? Do ACCPD regulations comply with state statutes regarding the duties of police who deal with persons they know are mentally ill?

Like the DA's report, the April 15 report recommends that we hire more police and give them more training in the use of firearms, a recommendation that, as the report says, will "impact on the police department budget significantly," i.e., will increase the amount of government money given to the police. Like the local DA, the Incident Review Panel actually thinks that the lesson of the Wright tragedy is that we hire more cops and give them more firepower!

In the matter of the gunning down of Edward Wright, the shameful behavior of the DA and of the ACCPD in handling the investigation is unworthy of the great State of Georgia or of a free people. If prosecutors and police can behave this way and get away with it, we no longer live in a free country. We live in a police state.