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Black Autonomy Federation

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*This is a statement by the Black Autonomy Federation that focuses
on the George Golden case and argues that death inquests should be
a standard for the Memphis Police Department.*

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The March 27, 2013, shooting and brutal beating of shoplifting suspect George Golden shows why there should be automatic court inquests into the use of deadly force against civilians by Memphis Police Department officers. It took the police and the Shelby County medical examiner's office almost three months to come up with an official cause of death in the case of Mr. Golden, who died April 5, 2013.

In the forensic autopsy report, the cops and the medical examiner's office claimed that "cocaine intoxication" was a major contributing factor in Mr. Golden's death, and that the gunshot wound to his head was not the primary cause of death. This conclusion was reached despite the fact that police officers beat and kicked Golden after shooting him.

The allegation of the use of cocaine was put in the autopsy report in favor of the cops, strictly to prejudice the case against Mr. Golden and to provide consistency with the police department's

story that Mr. Golden was “out of control” and “resisting arrest.” This is an almost constant theme by MPD officers when they have used deadly force, the idea that they were being attacked and had “no choice” but to use deadly force, even against an unarmed person like Mr. Golden.

Mr. Golden’s autopsy report and so many other dubious pro-police reports in cases of civilians fatally shot by MPD officers show that the ME’s office cannot be trusted to make truthful and impartial rulings in any forensic case involving police deadly force. The families of the victims and citizens’ groups will have to fight to have a court inquest into Mr. Golden’s case, and ultimately, in the case of teenager Justin Thompson and many others killed by MPD officers, in which the facts have been covered up and the cops are being allowed to get away with murder. Twenty-one people have died at the hands of Memphis police officers since February 10, 2012, including eight who have died so far in 2013. Not one officer has been prosecuted for using deadly force.

The Memphis Black Autonomy Federation has been advised that on a routine basis, Dr. Karen Chancellor, the current Shelby County medical examiner, meets with the Memphis Police Department’s “shooting team” to re-enact police shootings and to help the police concoct their stories. On the basis of these meetings, it is then decided which cases of deadly police force are justified. If it is true that the ME routinely confers with the MPD’s “shooting team,” the ME apparently considers herself to be an advocate for the police and government authorities, not an impartial medical-legal professional with the duty to determine the truth no matter where it leads concerning culpability.

It is the ME who falsely and routinely gives a final report to the Shelby County district attorney general as to whether excessive police force has been committed or whether a “clean bill of health” is issued to the MPD. If Chancellor is having tea with the very police officials whom she should and must investigate under her oath of

office, then she is merely part of the cover-up, and she alters her reports to suit the facts of cases in order to exonerate the police.

Final decisions in cases involving the use of deadly force by the police should be taken out of the hands of the Shelby County medical examiner, who is currently conspiring with Memphis police officers and government officials. There should be independent community control and civilian oversight of the MPD by an elected Police-Community Control Board. Otherwise, there will be more questionable acts of deadly police force while city and county authorities continue to show deliberate indifference to the loss of lives of civilians killed by Memphis police officers.