

Jacksonville Sheriff's officers' brutal attack on unarmed Florida man sparks outrage

Matthew Taylor
6 October 2023

The brutal arrest of 24-year-old Le'Keian Woods on September 29 by the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office (JSO) has drawn national attention after video emerged on social media in the following days showing multiple arresting officers assaulting Woods after he was shocked with a taser while fleeing from police.

In the video, police are shown slamming a bloody and handcuffed Woods on the ground despite no indication he was resisting arrest.

Social anger continued to mount following the release of Woods' mugshot by the cops last week. In the picture, both of Woods' eyes are swollen shut because of the beating inflicted on the young African-American man. According to his family, Woods suffered a ruptured kidney during the police assault. The family also says that Woods continues to suffer from migraine headaches and has been unable to eat without vomiting since the attack.

"When I looked at that picture of my son I felt like Emmett Till's mother, when she seen her son and he was unrecognizable." Natassia Woods told local media following the police assault. "And when I looked at [the photo], that's how I felt when I seen my son."

In an attempt to quell social anger, police released heavily edited body-camera video on October 2 showing part of the arrest and police assault. The footage confirms that Woods did not have a weapon, never attempted to strike or hit the police, and did not resist police as he was being beaten/arrested.

Woods had been riding in the passenger seat of a pick-up truck along with the driver and one other person when, according to the police, they pulled the car over due to the driver not wearing a seat belt. The JSO would later claim it witnessed Woods participating in what it alleges was a drug transaction at a nearby gas station, and that the cops had followed the truck he was riding in, using an unmarked vehicle.

Body cam footage released by the JSO shows Woods fleeing from the vehicle after the officers pulled the vehicle over in an apartment complex with guns drawn. In the footage one of the passengers in the vehicle tells the police, while he has his hands up, that he has a gun on his person. The cop responds, "I appreciate you telling me, but if you put your hands down you are going to get shot."

While the police handcuff and arrest the driver and back-seat passenger, Woods flees from the vehicle. Body camera footage shows one officer giving chase to Woods across the apartment complex grounds. As soon as Woods starts running the cop chasing him begins yelling "You are f***ed! You are so f***ed!"

As he is chasing Woods, the cop pulls out his Taser and yells to Woods, "I'm going to tase you, get on the ground!" The cop proceeds to shoot Woods with the Taser, sending two electric prongs into his back, allowing the cop to inject 50,000 volts into Woods.

As the electricity courses through Woods' thin frame, his body becomes stiff and he falls face first on the street pavement. According to police body camera footage, the Taser shocks Woods for approximately 8 seconds, with Woods prone on the ground for the last five seconds, prompting the Taser to emit a beeping sounds, indicating the trigger has been pulled for longer than five seconds.

The officer then attempts to handcuff Woods, who is clearly disoriented from being electrocuted and from the head injury he sustained after falling. The cop repeatedly orders Woods to "put your hands behind your back" while pushing down on the back of Woods' neck, shoving his bloody face into the ground, as he attempts to comply.

The officer can be seen shifting Woods, who is on his hands and knees, from one side to the other, making it impossible for him to put both hands behind his back at the same time. As Woods attempts to communicate that he is

trying to put his hands behind his back, the cop strikes him in the face. The officer then pulls Woods onto the nearby grass and continues his assault.

The footage then shows the officer pinning Woods on his right side while controlling his left arm. He orders Woods again, “put your hand behind your back.” At this point Woods, still attempting to comply, is supporting himself on one hand while straddling the curb, as the officer presses down on the back of his neck. The officer then turns Woods to his side and punches him in the face a second time.

A second large officer then arrives on scene and immediately begins striking Woods in the face with his knees. Woods, who is still immobilized by the first officer, is struck in the head six times. The first officer then punches Woods multiple times in the back of the head. Both officers then begin striking Woods and slamming him to the ground, as he can be heard gasping and moaning in pain.

Another body cam video from the second officer plainly shows him kneeling the helpless Woods in the face and punching him repeatedly in the face and ribs while the first officer holds him down. At that point a third officer can be seen pinning Woods’ head to the ground under his knee as he delivers three vertical elbow strikes to Woods’ head.

Throughout the assault the officers, aware they are being recorded, continuously shout, “he’s still resisting” and “give me your hands,” even though the battered and bloody Woods is heavily concussed and not trying to escape. After he is handcuffed, he can be seen bleeding profusely and making incoherent sounds as the police pick him up partially off the ground, and again shout “stop resisting” before slamming him back down.

After beating him, police left the handcuffed Woods sitting on the curb for approximately fifteen minutes before EMTs arrived. Upon searching the truck Woods was traveling in, the police reported finding drugs. Woods was later charged with armed trafficking in cocaine, armed trafficking in methamphetamine, armed possession of a controlled substance, resisting an officer with violence, altering, destroying, concealing or removing records, and possessing a controlled substance without a prescription.

No firearms were found on Woods, and the other passenger in the vehicle who was armed was not charged. The laundry list of felonies Woods is charged with, including the firearm enhancements, indicate that the police, fearing prosecution for their assault, have charged Woods with every imaginable crime in an attempt to justify their actions.

In fact, both of the other two passengers were released and not charged with felonies. One passenger was cited for driving under a suspended license and misdemeanor marijuana possession. It is unclear why Woods alone is

being prosecuted. Woods’ attorney has noted that, because he was a passenger in the vehicle, he had the right to leave after the vehicle was pulled over and that the police had no legal right to detain him in the first place.

Jacksonville Sheriff T.K. Waters has come out in defense of the officers who assaulted Woods, and thus far none have been suspended from duty or taken off the streets.

A nearby pedestrian recorded the end of the encounter, and it was because of this viral footage that the public first became aware of the assault. Waters initially claimed that the footage had been doctored to make the police look worse, and that they feared Woods had a gun in his waistband, both of which were refuted when the bodycam footage was released, as required by law.

Refuting racist arguments that African-American police chiefs would foster more “tolerant” police departments, Waters said, “just because force is ugly does not mean it is unlawful or contrary to policy.” He added the police involved in the beating would remain on the street, “where they belong.”

At least one of the officers involved in the assault, Josue Garriga, has killed before. In 2019 Garriga shot and killed Jamee Johnson, a Florida student who was also pulled over by Garriga over an alleged seat belt violation before trying to flee and crashing his car in a nearby yard. Bodycam footage showed Johnson falling out of the driver’s seat of the vehicle onto the ground before being shot multiple times by Garriga. The officer was cleared of wrongdoing, though the city later settled a wrongful death lawsuit filed by Johnson’s family out of court.

In 2015 Garriga was involved in a similar incident when he served as a Putnam County Sheriff’s deputy. Garriga was one of four officers who killed Andrew Williams after undercover officers sold drugs to Williams and then attempted to arrest him in an operation referred to as a “reverse-sting.” When he tried to drive away in his car he hit a tree and at that point officers claim he turned the car towards them before they opened fire, killing him.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact