

**THE DEATH OF MARTIN FREDERICK COTTON II**  
**UPDATE (Spring 08) FROM REDWOOD CURTAIN COPWATCH**

Since Redwood Curtain CopWatch learned of the Thursday August 9<sup>th</sup> death of Martin “Fred” Cotton II, we have spoken with many witnesses and other community members regarding the events leading to Martin’s death. Immediately after the Sheriff’s Department sent a press release (on the afternoon of August 10, 2007), local papers wrote ‘stories’ simply parroting the police account and criminalizing Martin. People’s reports to Redwood Curtain CopWatch share many common threads; facts and perspectives that stand out starkly against the police account.

**Martin was pepper sprayed and then beaten severely by the Eureka Police Department [EPD]; a sack was thrown over his head and he was taken to jail.** There, we believe he was further beat by Sheriff’s and possibly also EPD officers. The man next to the cell where Martin died witnessed officers dragging Martin, who was hooded and handcuffed, into a cell. Multiple officers (but no medical staff) then went into the cell. After 15 minutes of intense thumping and moaning coming from the cell, the officers exited, and *no further noise* came from the cell. The man in the adjacent cell was soon released. According to the Sheriff’s Dept, Martin died two hours after booking.

Martin mostly lived on the street and was known to be manic depressive and schizophrenic. Eureka officers, **Adam Laird, Justin Winkle, Gary Whitmer, Steve Watson, Joshua Siipola, Bryon Franco, Tim Jones, and Chandler Baird** beat Martin. They pepper-sprayed him, kicked him, beat him with night sticks, and punched him with fists— for up to 20 minutes by many accounts. Some of the Humboldt County officers known to have been in the jail where Martin died were **officers Dennis Griffin, Fernando Cangas, Chet Christensen, Frances Morgan, Adam Rossiter, and Devin Strong.**

Martin, known to be manic-depressive, was involved in a confrontation at the Eureka Rescue Mission on Aug. 9th, just weeks before his 27<sup>th</sup> birthday. Rescue Mission staff called the police, who arrived after Martin, *unarmed*, had already been ejected from the Mission. The EPD officers immediately pepper sprayed and began beating Martin. EPD pummeled Martin all over his body, including heavily attacking his kidney area and his legs while he was face down on the concrete. Each witness with whom we have separately and independently spoken regarding the attack by EPD has said at least five officers inflicted the beating, with several more present at the scene. Not one such witness observed Martin threatening or attacking the police. Many people present explicitly stated that Martin *never* reached for an officer’s baton. All witnesses have expressed trauma at watching what they explained as an unwarranted, long-lasting, and deadly beating.

**EPD officers intimidated people attempting to photograph the public incident;** one woman trying to take photos on a cell phone was reportedly threatened to put the phone away or it would be taken from her.

Eureka Mission House Manager, Bryan Hall, ordered some of the men who reside at the Mission and were witnessing the brutality to go inside after several minutes of the beating. Bryan, who made the call to police, was the only person from the Mission to attend the so-called Town Hall meeting featuring EPD Chief, Garr Nielsen, on Thursday August 16th. Bryan defended the police and told a very different story than we have heard from all other witnesses. It is our informed belief that the men who stay at the Mission *were not allowed* to attend the meeting to share their stories. Additionally, many of the witnesses, who already suffer from police harassment and abuse, are fearful of retaliation if they were to step forward.

On the 16<sup>th</sup>, Chief Nielsen admitted that he *had not read a report from the incident*, yet since his very first interview on the matter he has insisted, without a doubt, that ‘his’ officers were warranted in their actions. At the same time he has consistently criminalized Martin and justified the killing with speculations of methamphetamine use, even going so far as to blame Martin for his own death. At the Thursday meeting Nielsen spoke of a Sheriff’s’ film showing Martin banging his head on the walls of the jail. Nielsen repeatedly expressed relief stemming from his belief that Martin banged his own head to death, rather than being killed by officers. Two days after the meeting, *Nielsen admitted that he had not seen such a film.* Throughout the “Town

Hall” meeting, (actually occurring in a private restaurant owned by the mayor), the chief seemed far more concerned with the EPD public image than with the tragic death of another human being.

Martin is one of 9 people killed by the hands and weapons of local police officers (six involving EPD) in the past 2 ½ years. Martin’s death was perhaps the most brutal. Lawsuits have been filed against the City of Eureka by 3 other victim’s families. The District Attorney and the police have, regarding each incident, claimed that the force used by officers was justified. A former cop and 28-year forensic ballistics expert explains,

“...with the thousands of police involved shootings that have occurred, there are few where the officer or department has admitted a mistake or error in judgment; the department usually investigates its own shooting incidents and clears themselves and the officer of any wrongdoing.”

EPD is now using results of a toxicology report to further criminalize Martin and distract from EPD officers’ behavior - behavior that is unacceptable and unwarranted in *any* circumstances. As the EPD has scrambled to explain the death, the story has changed from methamphetamine overdose, to lung failure, to self-inflicted head injury, to LSD poisoning. This current theory is particularly absurd, considering that there is not a single well-documented case of lethal LSD overdose in humans. The reported value of 10.6 ng/ml is within peak blood plasma levels expected to result from common dosage. **The coroner’s interpretation of the toxicology report is seriously flawed; it is a thinly veiled attempt to justify murder.** Redwood Curtain CopWatch defies coroner Frank Jager to produce *any* peer reviewed scientific literature validating his claims of LSD’s toxicity.

*No officers involved in the deaths of Martin and others have been tested for drug or steroid use.*

Although Martin was severely injured from the cruel and undeserved beating, EPD took him directly to jail *to die*, rather than immediately bringing him to the hospital. Neither Nielsen nor any jail employee (Sheriff’s Dept) has indicated that Martin was seen by medical staff while in their custody, until he was dead. This is unacceptable and adds to the outrage that we feel.

Even if one were to *ignore* the deadly beating inflicted by police in front of the Mission and accept Nielsen’s ‘theory’ that Martin, high on LSD, banged his own head to death, the police would still be responsible; Martin was ‘in their custody’.

Martin was houseless... And he is someone's son, grandson, father-- and a brother and friend to others. **We are tired of community members dying at the hands of police.** Killing by EPD cannot be seen as a mistake-- it is EPD’s modus operandi, and it must stop.

Redwood Curtain CopWatch believes that as a community we can work towards creating real justice that heals & transforms rather than destroys and erases. **Police violence does not make us safe.** The police, as a structural component of our society, have not outgrown their long legacy of protecting the rich ‘from the poor’; and have accelerated their practice of further marginalizing the people most trampled by our socio-economic system.

We have experienced, documented, and heard stories about the consistent abuse of people who have mental health issues and of people who are homeless. These targeted populations are integral parts of our neighborhoods and families. (Martin was one of 3.3 million people in the U.S. diagnosed as manic-depressive.) **People who are in crisis need help not violence.** The police believe they can treat many of us like we are ‘scum’, like we cannot feel pain--our bodies and lives worthless, can be exploited and violently disposed. In contrast, Redwood Curtain CopWatch wants to create grass-roots support networks that respect, nurture, and heal the community; exploring true conflict resolution that has nothing to do with the police.

Please help us imagine creative alternatives to the violence of police. Let's work towards justice that's nourished by knowing our neighbors, taking care of each other, and relating to each other as dignified human beings.

**Please contact Redwood Curtain CopWatch:**

**copwatchRWC@riseup.net (707) 633-4493 website: redwoodcurtaincopwatch.net**