

Unarmed man dies in custody of Oklahoma police

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A man died outside of a movie theater late at night on Friday, February 14 while in the custody of police in Moore, Oklahoma. The family of Luis Rodriguez alleges that officers severely beat him before he died in the parking lot. Officers, who had arrived on the scene to respond to a reported domestic dispute between the man's wife and daughter, claimed he refused to show identification and became "combative."

A video recorded by Rodriguez's wife on her cell phone shows him on the ground of the parking lot under the weight of five officers. The video was confiscated by police but later released under pressure from the man's family.

Luis Rodriguez had gone for a night out to the movies with his wife and daughter. What he had intended to be a fun night out for the family turned sour when his daughter, Luhani, wanted to meet some of her friends. Her mother, Nair, refused to let her leave, and the two began to argue. The dispute escalated quickly, with Nair reportedly slapping her daughter Luhani.

Rodriguez attempted to break up the fight and Luhani stormed off. Rodriguez followed his daughter to attempt to calm her down, when officers arrived at the scene and stopped him. Officers asked Rodriguez for his identification card when Rodriguez noticed his wife Nair moving toward their car to leave. Rodriguez moved around the officers, attempting to prevent his wife from leaving and calm her down. As he walked toward his wife, the officers violently detained him.

Rodriguez's wife and daughter allege that officers beat him prior to and during the arrest, an accusation the police deny. Police officers pepper-sprayed him, pushed and held him down on the pavement, and placed him in two sets of handcuffs. Moore Police Chief Jerry Stillings has spoken to the press, claiming that his men did not use "excessive force" and that he

considered their actions "reasonable."

Luhani, the man's daughter, claimed not only did her father not resist, but that officers repeatedly struck him. When police officers pushed Rodriguez down to the ground, his wife began recording the incident on her cell phone. In the footage, one can see five police officers pinning Rodriguez on the ground. One officer has his hand on Rodriguez's head, pushing it into the pavement.

In the video, Nair shouts, "What are they doing this for? Why?" An officer approaches her and she asks him why they are pinning down her husband. The officer responds: "He refused to give his ID. He got combative. That's why he got put in this position. OK?" It is clear from the footage that the police officers attempted to intimidate Nair and her daughter while they handcuffed the unconscious and possibly already deceased Rodriguez. One officer warned her, "Ma'am, you're gonna end up getting yourself in trouble."

Despite Nair admitting to officers that she had struck her daughter and her husband had nothing to do with the situation, they continued to hold Rodriguez down and handcuff him. She shouts in exasperation, "It's incredible. You will see that man doesn't look for trouble. At all!" The officers prevented Nair from getting close to her husband, telling her that a medical team was on its way. Their daughter looked on as the scene unfolded. "When they flipped him over," she told an Oklahoma television station, "you could see all the blood on his face. It was, he was disfigured; you couldn't recognize him."

When the medical team arrived, they placed Rodriguez's body on a stretcher. He was unresponsive and did not appear to be breathing. Nair described the situation to the press: "I saw him. His [motionless]

body when people carry it to the stretcher... I knew that he was dead,” she told KWTW. In the video, one can hear Nair screaming, “Please tell me that he is alive. He is not moving.” When the family arrived at the hospital to see him, they had already moved his body.

The police officers have faced virtually no repercussions for their actions. Three officers have been placed on administrative leave with pay and at this point face no further discipline. The other two, volunteers from the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, have not been placed on leave.

No autopsy report has been released. Medical examiners conducted the procedure on February 16, but have made no statement on the determined cause of death. Chief medical examiner Amy Elliot claims that they are waiting on toxicology results until they can release the full report, which could take as long as two months to produce. The police undoubtedly hope this length of time will subdue public reaction to the incident.

Rodriguez’s killing comes within the context of a broader wave of police violence. On January 13, two Orange County, California police officers were declared not guilty in the beating death of Kelly Thomas, a diagnosed schizophrenic. In July 2011, police were investigating a report of vandalism when they came upon the homeless man.

Officers began beating Thomas after he declined to allow police to search him, citing his Fourth Amendment rights. “See these fists?” one officer allegedly told him, “They are getting ready to fuck you up.” Thomas was beaten so badly that bones in his face were broken and he choked on his own blood.

In August 2012, sheriff’s officers outside New Orleans killed a husband and wife involved in a domestic dispute. One of those killed was unarmed at the time of the shooting. Officers allegedly planted a knife on the man after the fact to cover up the killing. Two weeks before the incident, another Louisiana sheriff’s deputy shot and killed a 60-year-old woman outside LaPlace after she was pulled over for a headlight-related traffic violation.

Just last Tuesday, a South Carolina police officer shot an unarmed 70-year-old motorist. The sheriff’s deputy, Terrence Knox, shot Robert Canipe as he reached for his walking cane in the back of his pickup truck. The officer claimed he thought it was a long-barreled rifle.

Although Canipe is expected to survive, the sheriff’s department refused to release details about where he had been shot by the officer.



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