

Police shooting of unarmed man in Phoenix, Arizona sparks protests

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In Phoenix, Arizona, 34-year-old Romain Brisbon was shot dead on Tuesday, in yet another killing of an unarmed man by the police in the United States.

About 150 protesters took part in a march in downtown Phoenix to the police headquarters on Thursday, calling for an end to the nationwide epidemic of police brutality. The marchers demanded that the Phoenix police identify the officer who shot and killed Brisbon.

According to police spokesman Sergeant Trent Crump, the unidentified police officer and his partner were responding to a burglary call around six o'clock in the evening on Tuesday, when a local resident told them that men were selling drugs in a nearby car. The officer approached the car. Brisbon got out. The officer told the driver to show his hands, but, according to Crump, "Brisbon placed one or both hands in his waistband area, which caused the officer to draw his weapon and illuminate the suspect with his flashlight," Crump said.

Crump claimed Brisbon began to run away, but the officer chased him down and a struggle began. He said the officer thought he felt the handle of a gun in the man's pocket, and when the officer was unable to keep a grip on Brisbon's hand, he fired two shots into Brisbon's torso. Brisbon died at the scene. The officer was not harmed.

Later, it was found that the object the officer claimed he thought was a weapon in Brisbon's pocket was a bottle of oxycodone.

Brisbon leaves behind a wife and four children.

The police officer involved was described as 30 years old, and with the Phoenix police force for seven years. His identity has not been released.

The police narrative has been contradicted by witnesses. A friend of Brisbon's, Brandon Dickerson,

said he was in the car with Brisbon shortly before the shooting and saw part of the incident. He said Brisbon was dropping off dinner to his children in the apartment. French fries were still scattered about the front porch on Wednesday.

Dickerson said he never saw the officer try to talk to Brisbon, and that Brisbon wasn't yelling at the officer. "Who's gonna argue with police?" he said. "He [Brisbon] had no death wish yesterday."

Marci Kratter, a Phoenix attorney who represented Brisbon in an earlier DUI case, is now representing his family. *USA Today* reported that she is "concerned that the story offered by police is not complete." She said numerous witnesses will challenge the police officer's account of the events. Kratter said she was sending investigators to the scene of the killing to determine if a wrongful-death lawsuit is necessary.

Jarrett Maupin, a civil rights activist, was at the scene on Wednesday and had spoken to family members. "I think the statements given to me by neighbors, friends and family members are in direct contrast to what has been disseminated by the Phoenix Police Department," he said.

Speaking to the media, police spokesman Crump deployed the typical tropes aimed at casting Brisbon in the most negative light possible: "suspect," "ex-con," "reached for his waistband," "putting the officer in fear of his life." Meanwhile, every effort was made to defend the officer: "He was doing what we expect him to do," "investigating crimes neighbors are telling him about," "putting his life on the line for the community every day."

Brisbon was black, and the officer who shot him white. This has led to predictable efforts to paint his killing, like that of Eric Garner in New York City and Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, as entirely a question of

race.

Nora Brisbon, the mother of Romain Brisbon, thinks otherwise. She told the *Arizona Republic*, “This had nothing to do with race. This is about Romain and the wrong that was done to him, and I want people to focus on that. If they want to rally, let’s support him positively.”

Dana Klinger, Brisbon’s girlfriend, is white. She said people should focus on who Brisbon was as a father and son. The youngest daughter of Brisbon, 18 months old, is the daughter of Klinger. “He took really good care of me. He checked on me every day. I don’t know what I’m going to tell my daughter when it’s time to tell her,” Klinger told the *Arizona Republic*.

Both women criticized the media and the police for highlighting Brisbon’s prior criminal record. “Of course he did a few bad things here and there, but they’ve been taken care of,” Nora Brisbon said. “He was not just some raggedy thug out there on the street. He made a difference in everybody’s life that he touched.”



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