

Philadelphia cops cleared in killing of 26-year-old

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On Thursday, the Philadelphia District Attorney exonerated two unnamed police officers who stopped and killed 26-year-old Brandon Tate-Brown in December of last year. Later, Thursday night, police arrested 10 protesters for “disorderly conduct” at a community meeting in which residents expressed their outrage at the officers’ exoneration.

Tate-Brown, a 26-year-old unarmed black man, was shot and killed December 15 by a bullet that entered the back of his head. Multiple witnesses say that Tate-Brown was involved in a scuffle with police after a traffic stop but tried to break free several times.

Tate-Brown’s death and the immunity of his killers is the most recent expression of the growth of unrestrained police violence in America. The two unnamed police officers responsible for Tate-Brown’s death join a host of other police officers who have been cleared in the past year for killing unarmed civilians, including the killers of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, with no legitimate public oversight.

Not yet three months into 2015, American police officers have killed 248 people, according to the aggregating website killedbypolice.net. By comparison, in Germany there were eight people killed by the police in the years 2014 and 2013 combined. In neighboring Canada about a dozen people are killed by the police every year.

Police stopped Tate-Brown around 2:45 in the morning. Originally the police said that they stopped Tate-Brown because his headlights were not on. Later, however, they revised their statement to say that the car was running with its daytime lights on. A video still, released by the family’s lawyer, from a 7-11 market several minutes before the incident shows Tate-Brown’s car with its headlights on.

Police argue that Tate-Brown tried to make a dash for

the passenger door of the car in order to access a gun which was found with his DNA on it. Police, however, later stated on their website that Tate-Brown also “reached for his waistband” during the scuffle, suggesting that police had conflicting views of where the gun was—despite, in the final account, Tate-Brown having never touched or reached a gun.

Brian Mildenberg, the lawyer representing Tate-Brown’s family, told the *Philadelphia Daily News*, “We know from the video that his headlights were on, and we know that he wasn’t reaching for a gun when they shot him. Whether Brandon started the struggle or whether he had a gun is not clear, but we do know [that the Police Department] lied about two items.”

Though the witness statements and four pieces of videotape of the incident remain closed to the public, there is a medical examiner report that relays the initial police view of the event. It states, “What they know so far is the incident started as a car stop. The decedent said he was renting the car from a specific company. When police ran the plates, the plate comes back to a different rental car company. They ask the decedent to step out of the car, and the second officer notices a gun between the console and the seat. He tells the other officer. The decedent starts to fight with the officer. Both officers end up struggling with the decedent from the street onto the sidewalk. The decedent gets [sic] free of both of them and goes for the open car door where the gun was seen. One officer shoots the decedent once in the head.”

Mildenberg, however, told the *Daily News*, “From the video, the moment he was shot, he was running away from the officer, across Frankford Avenue. He was behind his vehicle, near the trunk of the vehicle—not near any doors—when he was shot and dropped down.” Mildenberg continued, “If you’re running across

Frankford Avenue, obviously that's not complying with the police officer, and we're not saying that's OK. But police aren't licensed to shoot every person that runs from them."

Following the announcement Thursday that the two police officers were cleared of any wrongdoing, the mother of the slain youth, Tanya Dickerson, spoke to *Philadelphia Newsworks*, saying, "I saw four videos... I'm telling you I saw my son nowhere near the right side and he never got to open the right side of that car door."

Solomon Jones, who blogs for *Newsworks*, spoke to Dickerson. He said that she described her son as a "humorous young man who loved to write and to laugh." She said he had been to prison before because he defended a woman he loved who was being hit by a man with a pipe. "He did his time and he came home and just wanted to live and work," she told him.

Police have not yet explained where the gun came from in the car, which they describe as "stolen." There also has been no explanation for why the police officers and Tate-Brown fought.



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