

Notes on police violence in America

Louisiana cops who killed 6-year-old charged with murder

Evan Blake
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The two deputy marshals who shot to death 6-year-old Jeremy Mardis in Marksville, Louisiana last Tuesday were arrested Friday evening on charges of second-degree murder and attempted second-degree murder. After pursuing the boy's unarmed father, Chris Few, deputy marshals Norris Greenhouse Jr. and Derrick Stafford unloaded at least 18 rounds into Few's parked SUV, striking Few at least twice and his son five times. Jeremy, an autistic first grader, was shot in the head and chest and died instantly, while Few remains in critical condition at Rapides Regional Medical Center.

At a press conference Friday night, State Police Superintendent Col. Mike Edmonson described body camera footage of the incident as "one of the most disturbing scenes I have seen."

Stafford is a Marksville police officer and Greenhouse is a reserve Marksville officer and a deputy marshal in nearby Alexandria, and both were moonlighting as Marksville deputy marshals at the time of the shooting. The Marksville Police Department has no use-of-force policy, nor are there guidelines on shooting at vehicles.

According to the *Washington Post*, the shooting took place shortly after Few and his girlfriend left a nearby bar, T.J.'s Lounge, after having a dispute. Seeing the couple drive off in separate vehicles, someone called 911, prompting Stafford and Greenhouse to pursue Few's vehicle, eventually cornering it two miles away at the closed entrance to a state park. They were later joined by another deputy marshal, Jason Brouillette, and Sgt. Kenneth Parnell, who at the time was working as a Marksville police officer.

More than five days after the police murder, two of the four agents involved in the shooting, presumably Greenhouse and Stafford, have refused to speak to authorities, keeping many details of the incident shrouded in secrecy. On Friday, Edmonson declined to say if the other two officers had fired any shots, who initiated the chase and why, as well as the timeframe of the body camera footage currently being reviewed by police.

While officials have withheld many crucial details of the chase and subsequent shooting, witnesses have described the reckless and brutal character of the Marksville police. Many have opted to remain anonymous, for fear of retribution by local police, whom they describe as "trigger-happy" and "crooked." Marksville is an impoverished community in rural Louisiana where many work as

sugar cane, corn and soybean farmers.

Santana Dominick, a resident of the neighborhood where the shooting took place, told the local *Gannett Louisiana* that she saw police chase Few, who complied with the officers' commands and pulled over to the side of the road. Dominick asserts that as soon as Few opened his car door, police immediately unleashed a barrage of gunfire on his vehicle. Dominick claims that police then pushed her and other witnesses away from the scene.

Another anonymous witness told *Gannett Louisiana* that the police sought to keep the incident "hush-hush," because Greenhouse is the son of an Avoyelles Parish district attorney.

Describing the local police, Dominick said: "It's crooked around here. I see police jump on men and break their arm, bodyslam children to the ground. ... They have no respect for us. We can't even live here comfortable because the police are nagging us for no reason."

Multiple anonymous residents assert that local police regularly stop young women known to have outstanding warrants or who are at risk of going to jail and proposition them for sexual favors.

Lt. Stafford has previously been sued in civil court on allegations that he stun-gunned a handcuffed woman and broke a 15-year-old girl's arm during a fight on a school bus. Stafford and Greenhouse were also accused of unjustifiably using pepper spray while breaking up a fight in 2013. In 2011, Stafford was indicted on two counts of aggravated rape.

Most recently, in July, Ascension Parish resident Ian Fridge filed a federal use-of-force lawsuit against Stafford and Greenhouse after the officers tackled and hit him with a Taser for openly carrying a weapon, which is legal in Louisiana. Fridge asserts that the officers then took his phone and deleted a recording of the incident.

Pennsylvania officer who killed unarmed man cleared of all charges

Despite video evidence depicting the brutal murder of unarmed 59-year-old David Kassick by Hummelstown, Pennsylvania officer Lisa Mearkle, a Dauphin County jury acquitted Mearkle of third-

degree murder and voluntary and involuntary manslaughter charges stemming from the shooting.

Mearkle claimed self-defense, alleging that she thought the unarmed Kassick was reaching for a weapon at the time of the shooting. He had been stopped for driving with expired emissions stickers, and allegedly attempted to flee on foot to his sister's nearby backyard.

Concurrent with the release of the verdict, the Dauphin County District Attorney's office finally revealed the incriminating body camera footage of the shooting. The video had been deliberately withheld from the public by judge Deborah E. Curcillo, who in May declared that its release would "impair the Defendant's right to ... impartial jury."

The release of the video, which has been viewed by tens of thousands of people, plainly demonstrates yet another brutal police murder. Mearkle is shown repeatedly deploying her Taser against Kassick, while screaming, "Don't move!" as Kassick writhes in pain. When Mearkle shouts, "Show me your hands!" Kassick complies by attempting to raise his hands while being electrocuted. Mearkle then shoots him twice in the back as he lays face down with his hands plainly visible near his head.

Jury foreman Scot Benoit told *Penn Live* that the panel initially reached a split 50-50 decision during its 12-hour deliberations. Following an intervention by judge Curcillo, who "explained the law again ... like it was to a bunch of 5th graders," the jury eventually reached its consensus not guilty decision.

Idaho rancher murdered in front of family

The family of 62-year-old Jack Yantis, an Adams County, Idaho rancher, claims to have witnessed two sheriff's deputies brutally murder him on November 1 while he was attempting to put down one of his bulls.

The Yantis family was finishing dinner with nephew Rowdy Paradis when they received a call informing them that one of their bulls had been struck by a car and needed to be put down. When Paradis and Yantis arrived, the deputies had shot the bull repeatedly with a semiautomatic rifle.

As Yantis aimed his rifle at the bull, "one cop turned around and grabbed his shoulder and jerked him backwards," Paradis told the *Idaho Statesman*. While Yantis tried to regain his footing, both deputies shot at Yantis, striking him in the chest and abdomen.

Paradis and wife Donna Yantis ran toward Jack, imploring the deputies to stop shooting. "And then they threatened me and my nephew ... threw us on the middle of Highway 95, searched us and handcuffed us, and wouldn't let us go take care of Jack," Donna Yantis said.

Paradis asserts that one deputy then pointed his gun at Paradis' head. He claims that after the shooting, the deputies' demeanor was "smug" and "almost celebratory."

"There was no shootout. It was a senseless murder," the Yantis' daughter, Sarah, told the *Statesman*.

Memphis cop cleared in shooting death of unarmed teen

Last Tuesday, a Memphis grand jury cleared officer Connor Schilling of any charges related to his July 17 killing of unarmed 19-year-old Darrius Stewart. The jury decision contradicts Shelby County District Attorney Amy Weirich's recommendation that Schilling be indicted on charges of voluntary manslaughter and employment of a firearm during the commission of a dangerous felony. A lawyer for the Stewart family says that they will seek a federal civil rights investigation.

Police claim that Stewart was a passenger in a car stopped by Schilling for a headlight violation, and was placed in the back of a squad car without handcuffs while Schilling checked to see if he had any active warrants for arrest. Authorities allege that Schilling found a warrant, and when he returned to the car to arrest and handcuff Stewart, the youth fought back, prompting Schilling to shoot him twice.

Weirich made her recommendation for a manslaughter charge based on the findings of an 800-page Tennessee Bureau of Investigation report given to her on August 20. She presented the evidence to the grand jury on Tuesday, which in turn quickly made its decision.

Austin police assault and arrest youth for jaywalking

Last Wednesday, police in Austin, Texas violently assaulted a group of youth for allegedly jaywalking. A video taken by a friend of those being arrested has gone viral, with over 100,000 views as of this writing.

During the arrest, four police are shown pinning, kneeling and punching two young men, 22-year-old Jeremy Kingg and his friend Matthew Wallace, while their friend Lourdes Glen implores the police to leave them alone. Later, when one of the boys is slammed to the ground in the middle of the street, Glen is arrested for coming too close to the arresting officers.

Kingg and Glen were released and their charges dismissed after spending a night in jail, while Wallace remains imprisoned for allegedly resisting arrest. In media interviews, they assert that they asked the arresting officers whether they could cross the street, and upon receiving no response they decided to cross. Then, the officers suddenly stormed upon them and carried out the violent arrests.



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