

Notes on Police Violence

Minneapolis police officers who shot and killed Jamar Clark will not face prosecution

Kevin Martinez
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On Wednesday, county prosecutors in Minneapolis announced that they will not file charges against two police officers involved in the shooting death of 24-year-old Jamar Clark last year. Clark's shooting sparked widespread protests in Minneapolis which saw the police respond with paramilitary units to break up demonstrations and an encampment.

Prosecutors argued that forensic evidence determined that Clark was not handcuffed and that he reached for an officer's gun, a standard alibi used to justify police killings. Hennepin County Attorney Mike Freeman told reporters at a news conference that officers Mark Ringgenberg and Dustin Schwarze struggled with Clark, who at one point had one of the officer's guns.

Following the shooting Schwarze and Ringgenberg were placed on "non-enforcement" duties.

Freeman told reporters, the officers "each stated their independent fear of being shot. Accordingly, the head of the county attorney's office has concluded criminal charges are not warranted."

According to dozens of witnesses, Clark was indeed handcuffed and pinned to the ground when officers fired a round into his head on November 15. At the news conference, activists criticized the decision not to file charges and questioned why Clark was shot 61 seconds after cops arrived.

At a press conference Wednesday, Minneapolis Democratic Mayor Betsy Hodges paid lip service to the protestors and tried to calm them down with assurances that the U.S. Justice Department and the U.S. Attorney's Office are investigating the shooting. She also promised an internal police investigation to see if the officers should be held accountable.

Hodges remarked glibly, "Today is a hard day for

everyone in the city of Minneapolis."

Despite eyewitnesses saying that Clark was shot execution style by police, county prosecutors said evidence showed that there was no DNA inside the handcuffs, although Clark's blood was on one of the restraints. The County Attorney also said that Clark did not have any internal or external injuries on his wrists that suggested he was handcuffed.

Activists with the group Black Lives Matter confronted the prosecutor after the press conference with one member telling him, "If the city burns it's on your hands." The prosecutor shortly thereafter left the conference.

Minneapolis Police Chief Janee Harteau said there would be safe spaces for people "to express their feelings and thoughts" before ominously warning that there were contingency plans in case protests turned violent.

Neither of the police officers' actions on the day of the shooting was recorded. The dash board video camera was not on since it automatically turns on when the lights and siren are used, which was not the case that day.

The officers were responding to the scene after Clark allegedly was interfering with paramedics who were trying to transport his girlfriend, RayAnn Hayes, to the hospital after he allegedly assaulted her at a party.

The police assert that Clark was resisting arrest and pinned him to the ground. According to county prosecutors, Officer Ringgenberg somehow lost control of his gun and felt Clark's "whole" hand on his firearm. Officer Schwarze then put his gun to the edge of Clark's mouth and told him, "Let go or I'm gonna shoot you."

Clark, according to Schwarze, then looked directly at him and said incredibly, “I’m ready to die.” It was at that point that officers say they feared for their lives and fatally shot Clark.

County Attorney Freeman was forced to admit that no eyewitnesses heard Clark say, “I’m ready to die.” Clark’s cousin, Cameron Clark, disputed this story with CNN saying, “I feel like the story is being made up, and it’s all lies... My cousin would never tell the cops to kill him. His life was doing good. My cousin never told me he was ready to die.”

There were immediate protests following the shooting and a protest encampment was set up in the following days around the Minneapolis Police Department’s 4th Precinct. Police violence was common place during the occupation with pepper spray being used against demonstrators. Four counter-demonstrators, with alleged ties to white supremacist circles, were arrested for shooting and wounding five protestors.

Texas man killed by Arizona cop in January pleaded for his life

According to a newly released police report, a Texas man fatally shot by an Arizona police officer begged for his life before he was killed. The officer has been identified as Philip Brailsford of the Mesa, Arizona Police Department, and has been charged with second-degree murder and fired.

The report detailed the body camera footage of the January 18 shooting and described the man, 26 year old Daniel Shaver, as sobbing and complying with officers who ordered him to crawl towards them. Police threatened to shoot him repeatedly if he did not comply.

One officer is described as telling him, “Alright, if you make a mistake, another mistake, there is a very severe possibility you are both going to get shot. Do you understand?” Shaver responded, “No, please don’t shoot me.”

The Maricopa County Attorney determined on March 4 that the shooting was unjustified. The killing was captured on the officer’s body camera but has not been made public. Shaver’s widow, Laney Sweet, has been coerced into silence and has been asked by county prosecutors not to speak out to the media.

According to the police report, officers were called to respond to a man pointing a rifle outside the fifth floor of a hotel. The officers ordered everyone to come out of

the hotel rooms and when Shaver and his wife exited they were told to get on the floor.

Shaver was told to crawl on all fours toward the officers. Shaver complied with the officers’ orders but made a motion toward his waistband to which Brailsford responded by firing five bullets from his gun.

According to the police report, “It appeared his shorts had fallen partially down his legs at that point” prompting Shaver to reach for his waist. Such a motion was similar, the report argued, to someone reaching for a weapon.

It has since emerged that Shaver had absolutely nothing to do with the alleged man holding the gun.

Sweet posted a video on YouTube of an audio recording of county prosecutors, including County Attorney Bill Montgomery, telling her she could not speak to the media if she viewed the body camera footage.

In the recording, Montgomery instructs Sweet that, “What you can certainly say is that you had the opportunity to meet with the assigned prosecutor on the case and to have your questions answered and concerns addressed and that you had the opportunity to view the video and it was very upsetting and disturbing. That’s it.” Under those terms, Sweet has refused to see the body camera footage.

Prosecutors already announced a possible deal saying they would consider a plea of negligent homicide to avoid the more serious charge of second-degree murder. At most, Officer Brailsford would serve 80 percent of a 3.75 year jail sentence.



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