

Highest ranking officer acquitted in Freddie Gray killing

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Baltimore Circuit Judge Barry G. Williams on Monday morning found Lieutenant Brian Rice not guilty of all charges relating to the detention and death of Freddie Gray. Rice is the fourth police officer to be tried in relation to Freddie Gray's death, two others of whom have been acquitted and one whose trial ended with a hung jury.

The acquittal of Rice at a bench trial comes after two weekends of resurgent protests throughout the United States following the killings of Philando Castile in Falcon Heights, Minnesota and Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, Louisiana by police officers. Additionally, it follows two attacks on police officers, in Dallas, on July 7 and Baton Rouge, July 17, which collectively killed eight officers. Both attacks were committed by ex-soldiers with black nationalist sympathies.

Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old African-American man, died after being arrested by Baltimore police officers on April 12, 2015. Gray was handcuffed and chained inside the police van but never strapped into his seat belt. The ride mortally wounded Gray by tossing him around the van, severing his spine. After he was admitted, comatose, to the hospital, medical examiners stated that Gray's 80 percent spinal sever was consistent with what one would see in a car accident.

At several points in the car ride the officers made stops and further detentions. During one of the stops Gray called for medical aid and said he could not breathe, according to a witness. At one stop a crowd surrounded the car and filmed the scene.

Rice is the highest ranking officer involved in the killing of Freddie Gray. The prosecution argued that Rice was guilty of involuntary manslaughter, reckless endangerment and misconduct in office by deliberately not securing Gray to a seat belt. The prosecution further argued that because of Rice's seniority he should have

known about newly-passed rules and regulations requiring detainees to be fastened to seat belts when in transit.

Judge Williams ruled that state prosecutors had failed "to show that the actions of the defendant rose above mere civil negligence." The judge stated that the prosecution's case rested on "presumptions or assumptions." Williams also supported the defense's claim that the crowd that surrounded the police van, filming the scene, and demanding accountability for what was going on, justified the police officers not adhering to a rule to ensure Gray was seat-belted.

Judge Williams had previously dismissed a second-degree assault charge against Rice and the prosecution dropped another misconduct charge at the beginning of the trial. The city of Baltimore has already negotiated with Gray's family for a civil settlement of \$6.4 million.

Of the six charged with Gray's death, three officers were white and three officers were black. Three of these officers have been acquitted, three remain to be tried—one being a retrial.

Rice's acquittal follows a long line of acquittals for police officers and others charged with criminal offenses in high profile killings. Among them:

- On July 12, 2013 George Zimmerman was found not guilty of second-degree murder in the killing of unarmed Trayvon Martin.

- Darren Wilson was exonerated twice for shooting and killing the unarmed Michael Brown, first when a grand jury chose not to indict him in November 2014, and later when the Obama Administration's Justice Department released a March 2015 report claiming his use of force was justified.



- In January 2014, all charges were dropped against the several police officers responsible for killing Kelly Thomas in Fullerton, California on July 5, 2011.

- On December 3, 2014 a grand jury decided not to bring charges against Officer Daniel Pantaleo for strangling Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York earlier that year.

- In June 2015, Michigan Sheriff Jonathan Frost was cleared by the county prosecutor of shooting and killing unarmed 17-year-old Deven Guilford at a traffic stop.

- In December 2015 a grand jury found Cleveland police officer Timothy Loehmann not guilty of killing 12-year-old Tamir Rice, who held a toy pellet gun in a park.

Since the outbreak of mass protest over police violence the Obama administration has feigned support for the victims of police violence while at the same time fully backing the military-style police quashing of protests in Ferguson, Missouri and Baltimore.

The Justice Department has initiated several investigations into police shootings and oversight programs into police departments—all of which have amounted to nothing. In virtually every case that has come before Federal courts the Obama administration has supported the side of the police.

Police officers are essentially immune from criminal prosecution in the United States. In November of last year the US Supreme Court further expanded the “qualified immunity” doctrine, which shields police officers from legal authority, specifically in civil rights cases.

Last year, at least 1,208 people were killed by police in the US. As of this writing, 2016 is on track for a similar number, with an estimated 637 people killed.

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