

State trooper kills unarmed deaf man in North Carolina

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North Carolina state trooper Jermaine Saunders shot and killed Daniel Kevin Harris on August 18 during a traffic stop. Harris, who had a three-year-old son, was deaf.

Harris had not heard the sirens as he was pursued; Saunders claims he had pursued Harris for 10 miles. When he stopped, Harris exited his vehicle, ostensibly to communicate with Saunders. According to eyewitnesses, Saunders shot him dead almost immediately as he exited the vehicle.

Witnesses have said that they believed Harris was attempting to communicate in sign language. He was killed in his own neighborhood, mere feet away from his home. Saunders has been placed on paid administrative leave.

Harris's brother, Charles, has questioned why his brother, who was unarmed when he was killed, should have been shot over a traffic violation. In a Facebook post, Charles Harris stated that Kevin was "really scared" of police; multiple reports of police violence and murder of unarmed individuals had led him to feel that he was vulnerable to attack.

"Worst thing is...my brother Daniel is deaf. How he can communicate with polices and able to feel safe and protect himself from police? My brother is UNARMED and still get shot by police," Harris wrote.

Sam Harris, another of Kevin's brothers, related to WCNC, a Charlotte news station, how he, himself had found himself accosted aggressively by police: "I pulled over and within a few seconds, the officer is at my window with his weapon drawn and in my face. I motioned to him. I'm deaf, I'm deaf!"

Daniel Harris was one of six people nationwide killed by police on August 18. Since then, police have killed at least 14 more people.

One of those killed was an as yet unidentified 71-year-

old man in Indio, California. His death, which was filmed by 17-year-old Mikayla Mendoza, came after Indio police reported being called to the scene to apprehend a man armed with a knife.

Mendoza stated to the *Desert Sun News* that he was shot multiple times, although he had made no movement towards the police. She stated that he called out in Spanish, trying to communicate with police, although she could not understand what he was saying.

"He wasn't doing nothing to be shot," Mendoza stated to the *News*. "He was just standing, standing, standing. He never went towards the cops or anything." Mendoza expressed shock and horror at the way the elderly man was killed. "I started crying. Nobody deserves to die like that. I didn't expect that from any cop in this city."

Police attempted CPR on the fallen man and called for an ambulance. He was pronounced dead at nearby JFK Hospital.

The Indio Police Department were unaware that Mendoza had filmed the incident until they were questioned by press. They have stated that her footage will be reviewed as evidence. One officer, who has not been named, has been put on paid leave pending investigation.

The Indio Police Department is being sued for \$15 million for the wrongful death of Juan Perez, whom they shot last year. They were forced to pay \$2.6 million in a settlement for the 2014 death of Alejandro Rendon, an unarmed farm worker whom they shot as he rode his bicycle to work. That same year, two police officers kicked and beat a suspect as he was lying prone, then falsified arrest records.

The deaths of both Kevin Harris and the unnamed elderly man in Indio reflect the intensity and pervasiveness of both police violence and the terror

with which American citizens regard cops. They bear certain parallels with other shootings this summer.

Joseph Nathaniel Weber of Hays, Kansas, a nonverbal autistic man, was gunned down by police for failing to stop for a minor traffic violation on August 19. In June, North Miami police shot Charles Kinsey by mistake, after attempting to shoot the autistic man Kinsey was assisting. Kinsey's client was holding only a toy truck at the time of the shooting. Kinsey survived the shooting, as did his client, although his client is reportedly traumatized.

Like Kevin Harris, 23-year-old Korryn Gaines of Baltimore was terrified of the police. Baltimore Police justified the disturbed young woman's terror by invading her home to serve a bench warrant on August 22. Knowing that Gaines was agitated, the police escalated the confrontation. They shot Gaines to death as she held her five-year-old son in her arms, and shot her son nonfatally.

More than 756 Americans have been killed by police since January. In 2015, police killed more than 1,200 citizens. Shootings continue despite the increased use of bodycams and dashcams.

In Gaines's case, the Baltimore Police Department alleged that the SWAT team dispatched to her home was not equipped with cameras. In the case of Harris, the North Carolina state troopers have stated that they are reviewing the footage from Saunders's dashcam and have urged the public to avoid drawing conclusions about the killing.

Harris's family, however, have said that the police have offered them no answers in the wake of his death. At Daniel's memorial vigil on Monday, Sam Harris addressed the gathered mourners. "Daniel's death is just a shock—what is it for?" he asked. "It's definitely worthy, it has value, and I'm angry about it."



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