

Jury deadlocks in South Carolina police murder trial

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A mistrial was declared and the jury discharged Monday afternoon following a month-long trial against former North Charleston police officer Michael T. Slager, who was charged with murder after a bystander video surfaced showing him gunning down Walter Scott, age 50, while fleeing a traffic stop.

Slager's initial report stated he shot Scott in self-defense while the two struggled over his Taser. The video shows Slager planting the Taser next to Scott's body after the shooting. Despite the damning evidence, however, the mistrial is the latest in a series of cases where police officers have escaped conviction.

While local prosecutors say they will retry Slager and he still faces potential federal civil rights charges, the record shows that convictions of killer police officers are very rare. While police kill 1,000 people a year, since 2005 only 78 have been charged with murder or manslaughter, according to a Bowling Green University study. Only a small fraction of those were actually convicted.

Criminal juries must be unanimous. A single holdout juror, perhaps in this case influenced by pro-police propaganda, can trigger a mistrial. The outcome did not come as a surprise after the events of last Friday, the third day of deliberations, when one juror stated in a note to South Carolina Circuit Judge Clifton B. Newman that he could not "in good conscience consider a guilty verdict."

"We all struggle with the death of a man and with all that has been put before us," the juror wrote. "I still cannot, without a reasonable doubt, convict the defendant. At the same time, my heart does not want to have to tell the Scott family that the man who killed their son, brother and father is innocent. But with the choices, I cannot and will not change my mind."

In a separate note, the foreman, the only African

American on the 12-member jury, reported to the judge that the jurors were on the verge of reaching a verdict, and "It's just one juror that has the issues," adding, "that juror needs to leave."

The jurors returned to court on Monday to continue deliberating, sending additional notes before announcing they were hopelessly deadlocked. As of this writing, no juror has spoken to the media, but based on Friday's notes, the count is assumed to be 11-1. It is not known whether the majority of jurors were leaning in favor of a murder conviction, which carries a sentence of 30 years to life imprisonment, or the "lesser included charge" of manslaughter that could have resulted in a sentence anywhere from 2 to 30 years.

Slager is facing a federal indictment for violating Scott's civil rights and can be tried on those criminal charges regardless of the outcome of the South Carolina case. It is highly likely, however, that the Obama administration—which has not convicted a single killer cop—will dump the Scott case into the hands of Trump's Justice Department, which will be headed by Jeff Sessions, a Republican senator from Alabama and fanatic law-and-order advocate.

On the morning of April 4, 2015, Slager pulled over Scott for a non-functioning brake light, ironically next to an auto parts store. Scott fled on foot. There apparently was a brief altercation that ended right before the video begins. Scott was running away, at least 17 feet from Slager, when the officer fired an eight-round fusillade.

Five bullets struck Scott, one in the buttocks, one grazing an ear, and three in the back. The fatal round tore through Scott's lungs and pierced his heart.

The video recording of the cold-blooded murder received widespread national attention and bolstered

popular opposition to police killings, including over the death of Freddy Gray in Baltimore, which occurred a week after the Scott killing. Within days of the release of the video, Slager was fired, charged and arrested. Scott's family members settled their wrongful death claim against North Charleston for \$6.5 million last year.

The Scott trial is the latest in a series of similar cases over the last few months.

On October 10, a New Mexico jury, deadlocked 9-3 in favor of acquitting two Albuquerque police officers, Keith Sandy and Dominique Perez, captured on video cameras they were wearing gunning down James Boyd, a homeless and mentally ill man being roused from an encampment on a hill at the edge of town.

On November 12, an Ohio judge declared a mistrial after the jury failed to reach a verdict in the case of a University of Cincinnati police officer, Ray Tensing, charged with murder in the fatal shooting of an unarmed motorist, Samuel DuBose.

The media and various proponents of identity politics claim police killings are the product of pervasive racism in American society. While police departments are certainly breeding grounds for the most backward and reactionary conceptions, including racism, state violence arises from the role of police in capitalist society—i.e., the defenders of the wealth and property of the few against the overwhelming majority of society.

The perpetrators of this violence are police officers of all races, and their victims are overwhelmingly working-class and poor, black, white and immigrant. While Scott and DuBose were black men killed by white officers, in Albuquerque the victim was an impoverished white man shot by white and Latino police officers.



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