

Illinois man dies after police shootout on commuter train

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Last Friday, a 32-year-old man died on a commuter train traveling from the south suburbs of Chicago to Fox Lake, Illinois.

Jamal Parks died from a gunshot wound to the head in Deerfield, Illinois, in the midst of a dangerous police shootout aboard a passenger-filled train. The details of his death remain quite murky.

A preliminary autopsy report from the Lake County coroner released on Tuesday claimed that his death was self-inflicted by a single gunshot wound to the head. However, initial reports also suggested that police officers shot and killed him. The findings were released by the Illinois State Police Public Integrity Task Force, but the coroner's office is expected to provide a final ruling after further forensic testing.

Parks was alleged to have been a suspect in the death of a man in the suburb of Evergreen Park. Video footage showed that three men killed a man inside an SUV in a Walgreens parking lot, according to Orland Park police chief Tim McCarthy, spokesperson for the South Suburban Major Crimes Task Force.

Parks departed from Evergreen Park last Friday night on the Milwaukee District North Line Metra train. According to Illinois State Police, the West Division police officers of the South Suburban Major Crimes Task Force followed him in plainclothes on the train. When the train stopped at the station at 10:30 p.m. in Deerfield, Illinois, north of Chicago, the officers requested assistance from the Deerfield Police Department.

According to the Illinois State Police, the plainclothes officers and the Deerfield police surrounded the stopped train. Officers both inside and outside were allegedly preparing for Parks to leave the train at Deerfield. When he failed to do so, they attempted to apprehend him.

Parks reportedly spotted the officers in plainclothes and ran to the top level of the train. Three officers chased him on the upper level, according to McCarthy. One officer reportedly tried to take him into custody, but according to official reports, he broke free, pulled out a handgun and allegedly fired at the police. The officers began to fire back and initial reports suggested he was struck by police bullets in the ensuing melee.

Subsequent reports from the police claim that Parks "likely killed himself." As of right now, there is no independent testimony or corroboration of what actually transpired in the train compartment. Parks was taken to nearby Highland Park Hospital where he was pronounced dead.

The officer that fired at Parks, however, was placed on desk duty pending the investigation into the shooting, according to McCarthy. It is not clear at present to which department he belongs, whether from the south suburbs or from Deerfield.

The shootout took place on board a passenger-filled train, alarming everyone on board. According to a Metra spokesperson, at least 40 passengers were traveling aboard the Milwaukee North District Line No. 2155 when the shootout began in Deerfield.

Passengers speaking to the *Chicago Tribune* noted that they were terrified after hearing shots fired and seeing other passengers run away. When conductors became aware of the situation, they quickly tried to direct passengers away from the train car where the shootout was taking place.

Metra spokesperson Meg Reile stated passengers were not initially evacuated from the train because of concerns they would be in the line of fire. It is not clear if this directive came from the police or not, but passengers were finally evacuated and detained at a nearby Home Depot store for more than five hours for

questioning by police.

One passenger, Brian Johnson, a comedian, was traveling back on the train when he heard the gunshots. Speaking to the *Tribune*, he said, “I thought it would be a normal train ride, as usual. We stopped (at the Lake Cook station) and the conductors said there was a problem with a signal ahead. I was having an allergy attack and went to the bathroom to blow my nose, then I was hearing gunshots. The conductor was yelling for us to get in the other car.”

Johnson was one train car away from the shooting and he, along with four others in that car, was directed out of the car by the conductor. Trying to figure out what happened in the midst of the panic, Johnson said, “One of the passengers first thought it was a terrorist attack. Another passenger (who had been asleep on the train) couldn’t get his stuff and had to go with no shoes.”

Whatever transpired in the train car during the shootout, there are a lot of details that remain completely unclear. The contradictory reports that have come out since Parks's death—whether Parks was shot by an officer or shot himself—and the police shootout on the commuter train suggest not all may be as it seems. While it is possible that Parks may have pulled a handgun after an officer tackled him, this claim remains unverified at present and uncorroborated by any other witnesses.

Also unanswered by the official reports is why the police sought to confront an alleged suspect on a train full of passengers, thereby risking the lives of everyone on the train. The entire operation seems to have been quite reckless. The end result of the police shootout was the death without trial of a young man, an increasingly common phenomenon in American life.

Police and media have pointed to Jamal Parks's criminal history, including being sent to prison for possession of a firearm in 2009, armed robbery in 2002, and other minor crimes, including charges filed against him for possession of cannabis and failure to stop at a stop sign. Parks's criminal record is little more than a reflection of the social conditions facing wide swaths of working class youth in Illinois and around the country, with few economic and social opportunities, frequent run-ins with the law, and a criminal justice system stacked against them.

In various incidents of police shootings around the

country, police officers have been known to fabricate evidence, falsify the facts, and frequently claim that they “feared for their lives” when, in fact, they were the aggressors. Last year, police killed more than 1,150 people, and at least 30 people have been killed in the first week and a half of 2017, continuing the unending reign of police terror that has become routine. Police departments across the United States have become highly militarized and increasingly respond to even minor incidents with overwhelming violence, a reflection of the brutalized state of class relations in this country.

The majority of those killed by the police across the country have been the poorest sections of the population. While Wall Street surges to new heights at the expense of the working class—a consequence of the policy of the Obama administration and both political parties following the financial crash of 2008—millions of working people endure economic and social hardship daily, with increasing attacks on their democratic rights and living standards.



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