

Tulsa, Oklahoma police officer acquitted in 2016 killing of Terence Crutcher

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In a tense and teary courtroom scene on Wednesday, Tulsa Police Department (TPD) officer Betty Jo Shelby, who is white, was found not guilty of first degree manslaughter for the killing of 40-year-old Terence Crutcher on September 16 last year. Crutcher, who had been unarmed, was killed by a single gunshot to his chest after failing to heed police orders.

Crutcher, an African American father of four children, had been approached by TPD police due to complaints that his unaccompanied vehicle had been blocking traffic in the street. Several civilian complaints had stated Crutcher appeared high and was behaving erratically. When Crutcher failed to comply with Shelby's orders to get on his knees, instead walking away toward his vehicle with his hands raised, Shelby opened fire while another officer, Tyler Turnbough, shot him with a Taser. Shelby had been removed from active duty after the killing.

During the incident, TPD officers behaved in a manner indifferent to Crutcher's life. In police footage of the killing, one officer observing the confrontation can be heard remarking "Time for a Taser, I think," which is then followed by another exclaiming, "That looks like a bad dude, too."

The police officers, seemingly in a rush to obtain incriminating evidence, searched through Crutcher's vehicle and his pockets instead of attempting to perform life saving measures on the fatally wounded man. Several minutes passed before first aid measures were attempted. Crutcher died shortly afterward.

Prosecutors had refuted claims that the slain man had been reaching into his car through the driver's window when Shelby shot him by showing pictures of Crutcher's SUV after the shooting, with its windows rolled up.

Shelby, who took the stand at her own trial, callously

declared "I did everything I could to stop this... Crutcher's death is his fault." Shelby also declared that, as a police officer, she was trained "not [to] pull a Taser out, which is less lethal. I meet a gun with a gun."

When a prosecutor asserted "you're not meeting a gun with a gun. You're meeting a guess about a gun with a gun," defense attorney Shannon McMurray alleged that all mentions of Crutcher having been unarmed were "deceitful" and should be disregarded, in essence demanding the victim's presumption of innocence and vital facts about the case be thrown out.

Crutcher's family as well as several jurors, who had requested the opportunity to explain their decision, were escorted from the courtroom in tears after the verdict was announced. Tiffany Crutcher, Terence's sister, stated that the police were "corrupt" and "Terence was not the aggressor; Betty Shelby was the aggressor... Betty Shelby had the gun. Betty Shelby was following him with his hands up."

Joseph Crutcher, Terence's father, stated "I have four grandchildren that are at home that has lost their daddy. I said I would accept whatever the verdict was, and I'm going to do that. But let it be known that I believe in my heart that Betty Shelby got away with murder."

According to Shelby's defense attorney, the police officer was "elated and very proud of her jury" and "ready to get back to her life."

Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin, reflecting fears that the court ruling would spark social unrest, issued a statement insisting that "those who disagree with the verdict have the right to express their opinions; I just ask that they do so in a peaceful manner." Protestors gathered outside of the courthouse, with several demonstrators attempting to make their way to the hotel where they believed the exonerated Shelby had been

staying.

The exoneration of Crutcher's killer comes amid an expanding wave of homicidal police violence. Police killed a record 1,150 people in 2016, the same year Crutcher was shot dead. Police have continued their killing spree in 2017, with the aggregator web site killedbypolice.net showing over 450 police-involved killings this year. Such numbers, consistent with a low-level insurgency or civil war, have gone nearly unmentioned in the media.

In response to the verdict, US Attorney Danny Williams promised that a parallel federal civil rights investigation would "seek justice on behalf of [the Crutcher family], and for the public." The future of such an investigation is in serious doubt, as it was reported by NPR that Williams has been asked by Attorney General Jeff Sessions to resign.

Additionally, last month, the US Department of Justice issued a memo announcing a sweeping review of previous civil rights agreements reached between the federal government and local police departments in order to "ensure that those initiatives effectively dovetail with robust enforcement of federal laws designed to preserve and protect civil rights."

Tulsa, with a population of 403,505, is the second largest city in the state of Oklahoma. Often referred to as "the oil capital of the world," the city is a profit center for the US energy industry. Dozens of firms connected with the extraction, processing and transfer of energy resources are headquartered in the city.

According to the Oklahoma Policy Institute, there are more women in prison in the state than are served by the state's welfare programs. Recent US Census data shows that there were over 270,000 people living in "extreme poverty" in Oklahoma, surviving on less than \$200 a week.



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