

South Carolina cop sentenced to 20 years for murder of Walter Scott

Daniel de Vries
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Former South Carolina cop Michael Slager received a sentence of 20 years in prison Thursday for the April, 2015 murder of Walter Scott. The sentence handed down is one of very few instances of US police officers ordered to serve jail time, despite more than a thousand police killings each year.

Slager almost certainly would have escaped prison, like the rest of his cohort, had the shooting and cover-up not been recorded by a bystander. The North Charleston police officer claimed he acted in self-defense, supposedly fearing for his life amidst a struggle for his taser. In the immediate aftermath, the press dutifully carried the officer's story and sought to smear the victim by dredging up past legal infractions.

Three days later, however, a cell phone video surfaced documenting nothing less than murder. Slager unloaded eight shots to the back of the unarmed 50-year-old, who was fleeing from him. After cuffing the dying man, Slager jogged back, picked up his stun gun and dropped it alongside the body.

Scott, a father of four, had been pulled over for a busted car taillight.

The damning video was viewed by millions. It sparked a wave of protests nationwide, following in the wake of demonstrations against other high-profile police killings, most notably the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri the previous August.

In the ruling handed down Thursday, US District Judge David Norton sentenced the former officer for second degree murder and obstruction of justice. Judge Norton noted in his decision the "malice and recklessness" of Slager and the false testimony he gave to investigators following the killing.

In May, the ex-cop pleaded guilty to federal civil rights offenses, settling with prosecutors in exchange for the dropping of a first degree murder charge at the

state level. Conviction for the latter could have meant life in prison.

This is the second trial for Slager. In 2016, the state case ended in a mistrial, with a hung jury. Attorneys for Slager continued to argue that he felt his life was in danger, despite the video unambiguously demonstrating otherwise.

Following Thursday's sentencing, the Scott family expressed satisfaction with the ruling. One of the victim's brothers, Anthony Scott, thanked Feiden Santana, who had the courage to record the killing and its aftermath.



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