

Police in Racine, Wisconsin fatally shoot 26-year-old man during traffic stop

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Police officers in Racine, Wisconsin shot and killed 26-year-old Donte Shannon, an African-American man, on Wednesday, January 17 as he fled a traffic stop.

According to a statement by the Wisconsin Department of Justice, the shooting occurred late in the afternoon shortly after two Racine police officers in an unmarked car made a traffic stop on a vehicle for not having a front license plate near the intersection of 14th and Villa Street, shortly after the vehicle pulled out of a driveway.

Shannon, who was driving, stopped his vehicle and fled on foot. The pursuing police officers chased him into the yard of a nearby home where the officers allegedly witnessed the young man brandish a firearm. The officers subsequently opened fire, hitting Shannon multiple times.

The young man was fatally wounded, dying shortly afterward as he was being rushed to a hospital by paramedics. Family and friends told local media that they were not notified that Shannon had died until four or five hours later.

Per state law, the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) is handling the investigation into the shooting. The DOJ identified the two officers involved in Shannon's killing, who are both white, as Investigator Chad Stillman and Officer Peter Boeck, 15 and 16-year veterans of the Racine Police Department, respectively. Neither officer suffered any injuries during the pursuit and killing of Shannon. Both have been placed on paid administrative leave pending the investigation.

Racine police officers do not employ the use of body cameras and the unmarked police vehicle that officers were driving when pulling over Shannon did not have a dashboard camera.

Furthermore, the Racine Police Department and the DOJ have refused to provide any information

surrounding the killing following their official statement. This includes key information such as whether the police had recovered a gun from the scene, if by “brandished” Shannon was merely seen to be possessing a firearm or some other object as opposed to pointing a gun at the pursuing officers. Nor have any further details surrounding the circumstances that led to Shannon's initial traffic stop been released.

The killing has sparked widespread outrage among area residents and on social media, where people voiced anger over yet another in a long string of brutal police killings in the United States. Shannon was the sixtieth person killed by police this year. An additional twenty-three fatal police shootings have occurred in the one week since his death. Police have killed nearly four people every day this year.

The day after the shooting, protesters gathered at the scene where Shannon was gunned down by police. They repeatedly asked police officers still on the scene investigating the shooting how many times Shannon had been shot and whether those shots were warranted.

Residents in the neighborhood who witnessed the chase and overheard the gunshots purported to have heard over a dozen shots fired by the officers. At least six bullet holes were visible in a nearby fence.

Joseph Williams, who was an acquaintance of Shannon and lives near where the shooting took place, said he witnessed the incident from his home and estimated to have heard a total of at least a dozen shots. “If all the gunfire did not come from the suspect who is deceased, I feel this situation should be looked into a little better and someone has some explaining to do on why so many gunshots were fired,” Williams told Fox 6 Now.

Tiffany Powers, a Racine resident living across the street from where Shannon was killed, had a similar

estimate of slightly more than a dozen shots heard. Another unnamed witness estimated to have heard a total of about 14 shots discharged.

Donte Shannon's father, Nakia Shannon, also said police should have fired fewer shots after examining the multiple bullet wounds on his son's body. "We went to the morgue. We had the coroner unzip his body and we took a picture of every bullet wound on his body," he told local media, stating that he had counted 17 graze and bullet wounds on his son's body.

On Friday, more than 200 people took part in a protest march from the scene of Shannon's killing to a police station and then to the second floor of City Hall. At one point, protesters pounded on the Mayor's office door to speak with him. Protesters expressed anger over Shannon's killing believing the use of lethal force by the police was wholly unnecessary and were further angered over the lack of information on the incident and why lethal force had to be used. Protesters also raised the issue of longstanding harassment and repression by the police who disproportionately target African-Americans.

In wake of the protest, Racine city officials scheduled a town hall meeting for Monday evening. The evening of the meeting, officials began turning away people from entering the meeting just minutes after it started, claiming the maximum capacity of the room had been reached. Residents able to attend the meeting spent more than three hours voicing their disgust and anger over Shannon's killing and wider police repression.

At a press conference Monday, Racine Chief of Police Art Howell, who is African-American, declined to answer questions after providing a short briefing, deferring to the fact that the state DOJ was leading the investigation into the shooting and would only release information on the shooting once their investigation was completed.

Donte Shannon's family members who had attended the Monday press conference complained that officials had answered none of their questions about the circumstances surrounding Shannon's killing by police.

Shannon's grandfather, John Shannon, confronted Chief Howell after the news conference about the claim that the young man had brandished a gun and whether it was merely seen by officers rather than pointed at them. Howell refused to answer the elder Shannon's questions.

"They never said they found it. They never said they got a gun, okay?" Shannon explained. He also raised questions about the grounds for his grandson's initial traffic stop and the documented history of police beatings and killings escalating from otherwise non-threatening situations. "They said it was a traffic stop: About what? A front license plate that a cop doesn't even see because he's in back of you?"

He continued, "Just the reason to stop him is a made-up reason. People ... need to know if they don't have a front plate on their car—and there are millions in Wisconsin who don't—they can be killed. That's what they need to know. Tell the whole truth."



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