

Protests erupt after Thanksgiving police shooting of innocent man in Birmingham, Alabama

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Twenty-one-year-old Emantic Fitzgerald Bradford of Hueytown, Alabama, was shot and killed by Hoover, Alabama, police on Thanksgiving Day when they responded to a shooting at Riverchase Galleria Shopping Mall in suburban Birmingham.

In the aftermath of the police killing of Bradford, which was filmed and photographed by bystanders, the Hoover Police Department (HPD) has changed its story multiple times. On Friday, the HPD finally admitted that the African-American man was likely not the shooter, and that the suspect remains at large. An estimated 200 protesters marched through the Galleria on Saturday, demonstrating against Emantic's killing and the subsequent efforts of the police to justify his death.

On Thursday evening, amid families engaged in early Christmas shopping, a fight broke out at the crowded Riverchase Galleria, followed by a shooting in which an unnamed and at large suspect shot a young man twice in the torso while also wounding a twelve-year-old girl, leaving both in critical condition. Chaos erupted as shoppers took shelter in shops, bathrooms and closets.

In the midst of this chaos, the Hoover Police Department came onto the scene. Police quickly claimed that they had "secured" the Galleria and had taken down the shooter. Photos of Bradford, lying in a pool of his own blood, immediately made the rounds on social media.

Hoover Police Chief Nick Derzis told AL.com on Thursday, "Thank God we had our officers very close. They heard the gunfire, they engaged the subject, and they took out the threat."

Bradford's parents, Emantic Fitzgerald Bradford Sr. and April Pipkins, were alerted to their son's killing via social media posts. Many witnesses contradicted the police department's account of the shooting.

In one video, a man can be heard screaming, as officers

stand over Bradford's body, "That boy didn't shoot at nobody. He's dead!" and, "They just killed that black boy for no reason... He probably got a gun license and everything."

Not wishing to admit any wrong-doing, the HPD released an amended statement Friday: "We regret that our initial media release was not totally accurate, but new evidence indicates that it was not. New evidence now suggests that while Mr. Bradford may have been involved in some aspect of the altercation, he likely did not fire the rounds that injured the 18-year-old victim. This information indicates that there is at least one gunman still at-large."

Hoover police are now investigating the shooting internally, having placed the officer who killed Bradford on administrative leave. Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA) has taken over investigation of the original shooting at the Galleria, along with the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department.

Hoover police still maintain that Bradford was brandishing a pistol when he was shot; Bradford's parents have stated that he had a concealed carry permit, which is common in Alabama. Bradford's family and acquaintances have struggled to square their knowledge of the young man with the police department's allegations.

"They were so quick to rush to judgment," his father told the Associated Press. His mother, April Pipkins, said to the *New York Times*, "That was not his character at all." Carl Dean, one of Bradford's former teachers at Holy Family Cristo Del Rey school, said of the slain man, "He was a super sweet, funny, kind and goodhearted young man who never had a bad word to say to anyone. When I saw this morning that he was allegedly involved in causing the tragedy at the mall last night, I was shocked and in disbelief as well as heartbroken that this young

man is no longer with us.”

Both the police and Bradford’s family have requested videos and photographs from the crime scene. Bradford’s family has specifically asked to see body camera footage from the involved officers; the police department has not responded to those requests, nor have they confirmed or denied the existence of such footage.

Bradford is one of over 850 people who have been killed by police this year. Police kill over 1000 people in the United States on an annual basis. By contrast, 43 police officers have been killed in the line of duty during the same period. These disproportionate figures fly in the face of common appeals made to the public about the dangers of police work, claims that are used to justify arming the police with military-grade weapons as well as increasing immunity for officers who kill or disable civilians. As the numbers demonstrate, the police pose more of a threat to the general public than vice versa.

Bradford’s death is already being used to frame the killing of civilians by police as an issue of race. While there can be no doubt that racism certainly plays a rotten and corrosive role in many instances of excessive force, the overarching issue is one of class. The role of police, contrary to public relations sloganeering, is not to serve and protect the public, but to protect the interests of private profit. This means that the average American, whose wealth has been funneled upwards, cannot be seen as anything other than a potential combatant in confrontations with police.

Bradford’s death, like the deaths of thousands of others, cannot be addressed by anything other than a unified and class-conscious movement of youth and working people. This will not happen as long as police killings are framed as a matter of race and used to divide workers against each other in the interests of the capitalist system.



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