

Protests erupt in Birmingham, Alabama after Thanksgiving Day police shooting of innocent man declared “justified”

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Protests have erupted in the Alabama cities of Birmingham and Montgomery following Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall’s declaration Wednesday that a Hoover, Alabama police officer was justified in shooting 21-year-old Emantic Bradford to death on Thanksgiving last year.

The killing occurred just before 10 p.m. on Thanksgiving night at the Riverchase Galleria, a shopping mall in the Birmingham suburb of Hoover. Bradford was shot three times by the officer, whose identity has been withheld by the police and the Attorney General’s office. All three shots hit Bradford from behind.

On Wednesday, Marshall announced that the officer who killed Bradford would not face a trial, and that the killing was “justified” based upon “split-second” reasoning on the part of the officer, whom he said had acted in the interest of public safety. He did not specify how, exactly, shooting into a panicked crowd was conducive to public safety; it certainly was not safe for Bradford.

In the aftermath of the shooting, Hoover police immediately hailed the shooting as a victory on the part of the police department, claiming that Bradford had opened fire in the shopping mall and had injured two people. By the next day, they acknowledged that Bradford might not have been the shooter but held fast to their claims that his killing had been warranted because he had a gun. Later, they admitted, with much less fanfare, that Bradford had not been the shooter at all.

Eyewitness accounts have varied wildly since the shooting occurred. After the shooting, several witnesses reported seeing Bradford run away from the scene after

the initial shots were fired, only to run back when he realized that his friend, Brian Wilson, was no longer with him. He was trying to check on Wilson, who had been shot, when the Hoover officer fired three shots into him, killing him instantly.

Protests erupted in the days following Bradford’s murder. Demonstrators gathered in the Riverchase Galleria, as well as at the home of Hoover’s Mayor, Frank Brocato, and the Hoover Police Department. Some demonstrations shut down exits on to and off of the freeway that lead to the Galleria.

Protests spread to Alabama’s capital, Montgomery, when Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall recused the Jefferson County District Attorney from the investigation on December 13. Protesters marched in front of Marshall’s home several times, being dispersed by law enforcement each time.

On Wednesday, when Marshall announced that he had ruled the shooting justified, protesters marched in front of his office in the state capital. Two women were arrested for disturbing the peace when they returned to the site of the demonstration to collect their belongings after the protest had been dispersed.

Marshall’s decision to recuse Jefferson County District Attorney Danny Carr from the investigation has been an especially sore spot for Bradford’s family and others connected to the case. Marshall based his decision upon contradictory claims, saying on one hand that the officer in question is a witness in at least 20 open cases, which might prejudice Carr in his favor, and on the other, that his acquaintance with protest leaders could prejudice him against the officer.

Carr has dismissed the claim that he is biased for or against the officer who shot Bradford. Marshall’s

contention that he has a personal relationship with protest leader Carlos Chaverst, he says, comes down to a photo of him and Chaverst together, taken on the night Carr was elected as District Attorney; otherwise, he says there is no relationship between the two of them.

In front of Marshall's office on Wednesday, Chaverst unrolled a photo of him standing in a similar pose with Marshall and called upon Marshall to recuse himself based upon photographic evidence of their "personal relationship."

Protesters, including Bradford's family, have expressed no intention of stopping the demonstrations. An attorney for Bradford's father wants the name of the officer who killed his son to be released to the public. Emantic Bradford, Sr. has also spoken out against the way Marshall's office has handled the case, from taking it out of DA Carr's hands to releasing the decision to the media before speaking to Bradford's family personally.

"My son was a victim," Bradford told AL.com. "Whether the case was going the way you thought it was going to go, got some news good or bad, you should've told us something before you released it to the media."

Thus far, all involved agencies have circled the wagons around the Hoover Police Department and the officer who killed Bradford. Hoover Police Chief Nick Derzis has said that the officer is following procedures for coming back to work. Both he and Mayor Brocato have expressed their support for the officer and have stated that they will not be releasing body camera footage to the public. They deny that footage shows two Hoover officers bumping fists immediately after Bradford was slain—a contention that the Bradford family says could easily be disproved by releasing the footage.

Attorney General Marshall, Mayor Brocato, and Chief Derzis have also remained steadfast in their refusal to release the officer's name.

"If any other individual were investigated by law enforcement and there was no determination a crime was committed, that information wouldn't be public," Marshall told the media on Wednesday. "There's no reason for an officer to be treated any differently."

Such simple respect was denied Emantic Bradford. Before his body was even cold, Hoover police

confidently asserted that he was the gunman who started the shooting on Thanksgiving night—a claim that they were not nearly as eager to clarify once it became obvious that he was not.



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