

Fort Worth, Texas police officer charged with murder after shooting woman in her home

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Fort Worth police officer Aaron Dean, 34, was charged with murder Monday, two days after he shot and killed 28-year-old Atatiana Jefferson through the window of her home while she was babysitting her eight-year-old nephew early Saturday morning. The police killing early Saturday morning sparked outrage across the city and the US.

The Fort Worth Police Department, in an effort to quell an immediate outpouring of anger at the latest state-sanctioned murder of an innocent worker, quickly released the 911 emergency phone call recording and the body-cam footage extracted from officer Dean's camera that night, which showed that he opened fire less than a second after announcing himself. Both pieces of evidence clearly show that Jefferson, a young African-American woman who was studying in hopes of entering medical school, posed absolutely no threat to Dean.

With the cop clearly unable to present the typical defense that he felt threatened or fired in self-defense, the officer resigned from the force and was jailed on murder charges Monday.

Seething anger was expressed in Fort Worth, as thousands of angry residents, family members and friends gathered at community centers and churches Saturday afternoon into Sunday, demanding action. A Saturday morning police press conference had provided no answers.

Immediately following the murder, the police had attempted to shift the blame onto the victim by releasing a photo of a handgun that was allegedly found at the home. The police chief later expressed "regret" over this, admitting that Jefferson was legally entitled to have a gun in her own bedroom.

While pastors, newspaper editorials and "civic leaders" sought to channel simmering tensions towards empty promises of "reform" and a third-party investigation, likely to be headed up by the Texas Rangers, thousands

instead chose to march Sunday through downtown Fort Worth before being dispersed by police late in the evening. This was the context in which the authorities moved, after a two-day delay, to arrest Dean on Monday.

The deadly encounter had been set in motion when a concerned neighbor of Jefferson's, James Smith, who had lived on that same Texas street for fifty years, made a call to the non-emergency services line at 2:23 a.m on Saturday morning. Smith had been alerted by a family member that Jefferson's front wooden door was still open while the lights were on, which was not typical for her, especially so late in the evening.

Smith made the call after walking over to the house, where Jefferson and her nephew were inside playing video games. Smith approached the door and peered inside, through the still-closed storm door. Smith did not hear or see anyone, yet he also didn't see or hear anything out of the ordinary. In the recorded call to the dispatcher he noted that it was odd that the door was open, but that his neighbors' cars were still in the driveway. Smith reiterated to the dispatcher that he just wanted to make sure that his neighbor was fine.

Within five minutes after placing the call, Smith observed multiple vehicles approach silently up the street in a "tactical manner." Smith was struck by the SWAT-like maneuvers the officers were engaged in for a simple check that nothing was amiss, especially since Smith had not reported any suspicious behavior or weapons.

Smith didn't hear any of the officers announce their presence as they descended on the residence with their guns drawn and quickly surrounded the perimeter of the house. Officer Dean's body cam footage shows him using his flashlight to peer into Jefferson's car before unlocking the wooden gate to the backyard. As Dean and his fellow officers continue to trespass on the residence he turns to the left and shines his flashlight into the back window of the residence.

After shining his light through the window, and presumably seeing Jefferson standing there, perplexed as to why someone was shining a bright light through her window at nearly 2:30 in the morning, Dean quickly raised his pistol and shouted, “Put your hands up! Show me your hands!” Not one second passed before Dean fired a single shot through the house window, striking and killing Jefferson.

The Fort Worth police killing comes less than two weeks after the conviction of police officer Amber Guyger of the neighboring city of Dallas, in the shooting of Botham Jean in his own home two years ago. Guyger said she had mistakenly thought the apartment was her own. She was sentenced to ten years in prison, a light sentence for a murder conviction.

Attorney Lee Merritt, who is representing Jefferson’s family, issued a statement declaring, “I want to go ahead and dispel the myth that this is somehow a one-off—that this was just a bad-luck incident from an otherwise sound department. The Fort Worth Police Department is on pace to be one of the deadliest police departments in the United States.”

Fort Worth, however, as workers around the country can attest, is by no means unique. Every single year without fail the police claim well over 1,000 victims across the US. These killings come after years in which local police departments have been equipped with massive surplus equipment following the invasion of Iraq. The equipping and training of the police to operate as occupation armies in working class neighborhoods around the country has proceeded and escalated under both Democratic and Republican administrations, under both Obama and now Trump.

Trump, with his daily fascistic rants and his campaign rallies around the country, seeking support especially from within the police, army and border patrol, is creating the climate, not only for mass shootings, but also for killings by individual cops.



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