

Third man charged in the murder of Ahmaud Arbery

Matthew MacEgan

22 May 2020

On Thursday, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation announced that the arrest of William “Roddie” Bryan, Jr., the 50-year-old man who recorded the killing of Ahmaud Arbery, 25, on February 23 just outside Brunswick, Georgia. Bryan has been charged with felony murder and criminal attempt to commit false imprisonment and has been booked into the Glynn County Jail along with the Gregory and Travis McMichael.

No arrests were made in the immediate aftermath Arbery’s killing earlier this year. It was only after two different district attorney offices recused themselves from the case and video of the shooting went viral on the internet that the state stepped in and arrested Gregory and Travis McMichael, who were shown in that video confronting and killing Arbery. On May 9, Travis was charged with murder and aggravated assault, and Gregory was charged with party to murder and aggravated assault.

The pair pursued Arbery in a pickup truck after the latter allegedly trespassed on an open construction site in their neighborhood. While pursuing their victim, the McMichael’s passed by the home of Bryan, who got in his own vehicle and followed. According to Gregory McMichael, at one point during the confrontation Arbery ran around the McMichael’s car and it was at that time that Bryan tried to block the young man with his own vehicle. Arbery then ran past this second car, after which both reportedly turned around and continued their “hot pursuit.”

Shortly after this incident, at 1:14 p.m., Bryan recorded the video of Travis McMichael shooting Arbery three times, twice in the chest. The elder McMichael told police that he thought Arbery was a burglary suspect and claimed that he “violently” attacked his son Travis. It was only then, according to

Gregory, that the two struggled over the shotgun which led to the killing of Arbery.

Bryan previously spoke to local news reporters and stated that he had “nothing to do” with Arbery’s death. “I had nothing to do with it. I’m trying to get my life back to normal, and it’s been smeared for the past week. I was told I was a witness, and I’m not sure what I am, other than receiving a bunch of threats.”

Kevin Gough, Bryan’s attorney, had stated in the days prior to the arrest, “My client was responding to what he saw, which was someone in the community he didn’t know being followed by a vehicle he recognized. Without going into details about the level of crime in this community in this subdivision, I think most people in this subdivision were aware that there were issues.”

The WSWS noted last week that the only crimes reported in the neighborhood during the weeks prior to the shooting were the theft of a firearm from an unlocked vehicle belonging to the McMichaels and one instance of trespassing on the construction site in question. It was recently revealed by the owner of that property that trespassing has occurred on that property on several occasions by multiple people. The trespassers included not only Arbery but two small children and an unidentified man and woman. The owner insists that no burglaries occurred and no damage has been sustained to the construction site.

Bryan and Gough both previously denied that Bryan had any involvement or even a relationship with the McMichaels, but his name appears in the police report, where Gregory refers to him by the nickname “Roddie.” Photographs of Arbery recorded by the surveillance system at the construction site had been circulated through a neighborhood Facebook group as well as the social application Nextdoor, suggesting that

multiple residents were following these developments.

George Barnhill, one of the district attorneys who recused his office from the case, mentioned Bryan in his letter to the GBI in early April. Barnhill's son had worked directly with Gregory McMichael, a retired police investigator in the local district attorney's office, and he expressed the opinion that no charges should be brought against the McMichaels or Bryan. He claimed that the three had "probable cause" to believe that Arbery was a burglar on the run when they pursued and gunned him down in the street.

Attorneys for Arbery's family spoke favorably of Bryan's arrest in statement released to the media. "The family of Ahmaud Arbery was relieved to learn that the Georgia Bureau of Investigation has taken William 'Roddie' Bryan into custody. We called for his arrest from the very beginning of this process. His involvement in the murder of Mr. Arbery was obvious to us, to many around the country and after their thorough investigation it was clear to the GBI as well."

In addition to a 2017 video that surfaced this week showing local law enforcement attempting to shoot Arbery with a Taser, another has been published on YouTube that shows the arrest of the young man for shoplifting in a separate incident on December 1, 2017. The video shows Arbery and three teenagers being confronted by police in a Walmart parking lot about the theft of a television set. Arbery later pled guilty and was sentenced to five years of probation.

Benjamin Crump, an attorney for Arbery's father, has previously stated that videos such as these and reports of previous criminal infractions are circulated to hurt the character of the victim and justify the killing. "We've been here before, whether it's Tamir Rice or Trayvon Martin. When they kill our children, they then try to assassinate their character, and I know they're going to do that with Ahmaud Arbery.

Hundreds of people rallied outside the Glynn County Courthouse last Saturday, protesting the handling of the Arbery case. The first district attorney who was assigned to the case, Jackie Johnson, immediately recused herself from the case due to her previous work with Gregory McMichael, but District Attorney Barnhill waited several weeks and did not recuse himself for similar reasons until it was requested by Arbery's mother.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact