

Ahmaud Arbery's killers indicted on murder charges in Georgia

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The three white men who killed black jogger Ahmaud Arbery on February 23 were indicted Wednesday on murder charges by a Georgia grand jury. The men were not arrested and charged until last month, after a video of the brutal killing went viral on social media and prompted nationwide protests.

The three men are Gregory McMichael, a 64-year-old retired police officer and district attorney investigator; Travis McMichael, Gregory's 34-year-old son; and William Bryan, a 50-year-old neighbor who helped prevent Arbery's escape before he was shot and killed by Travis McMichael.

Evidence came out following the arrests that a Glynn County police officer had effectively deputized Gregory McMichael toward the end of 2019, directing a neighbor who was concerned about trespassers entering his property to notify the retired officer of trespassing incidents rather than calling the police department and making official reports.

On the morning of February 23, the McMichaels decided that Arbery, who was jogging through the Satilla Shores neighborhood outside of Brunswick, Georgia, was behind a "string" of local burglaries and pursued him in their pickup truck rather than calling law enforcement. Arbery ran for his life but was boxed in by both the McMichaels' truck and the vehicle of William Bryan, who joined the pursuit when they passed by his house. Travis McMichael then confronted Arbery armed with a shotgun and killed the young man who desperately tried to defend himself.

During the preliminary court hearing which took place earlier this month, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation revealed that Travis McMichael threw a racial slur at Arbery's dead body after murdering him in cold blood. Bryan told police who arrived on the scene that Travis spat the phrase, "fucking nigger."

Glynn County police initially made no arrests after the

shooting took place, allegedly because they were instructed not to by the first prosecutor assigned to the case. Three district attorneys recused themselves from the case over the course of more than two months due to conflicts of interest related to Gregory McMichael's association with law enforcement. One of those DAs, George Barnhill, wrote to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) defending the McMichaels, providing legal defenses for the pair which tainted both the local jury pool and the local prosecutorial pool.

District Attorney Joyette M. Holmes of Cobb County, who took over the case in May and ensured that all three men were arrested and prosecuted, announced Wednesday that a grand jury in Glynn County returned an indictment with nine counts against each of the three defendants: malice murder, four counts of felony murder, two counts of aggravated assault, false imprisonment, and criminal attempt to commit false imprisonment. All three men could face life sentences without parole.

The six-page indictment notes that the men are charged with trying to "unlawfully confine and detain" Arbery while chasing him, using their vehicles "offensively" and in a manner "likely to cause serious bodily injury." The malice murder charge under Georgia law is "the intentional killing of a person with malice of forethought." Holmes explained that malice does not need to be developed over a long period of time. "Malice can be formed in an instant."

Holmes declared, "This is another step forward in seeking justice for Ahmaud. We will continue to be intentional in the pursuit of justice for this family and the community at large as the prosecution of this case continues." Benjamin Crump, one of the attorneys representing Arbery's family, said that the indictments confirm "what Ahmaud's father has been saying for months—that this was a lynching."

The indictment came one day after the State Senate in

Georgia passed a hate crimes bill that had been approved by the House. Republican Governor Brian Kemp said he would sign the bill into law pending a legal review. The passing of the bill is an effort to alleviate popular outrage over Arbery's murder and the refusal of the local police to arrest his killers.

The killing of Arbery is one of several by police and former police this year that have fueled global mass protests, especially since the end of May when George Floyd was murdered in broad daylight by four police officers in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Regular rallies have been held in Louisville, Kentucky to demand that the officers who shot and killed Breonna Taylor, a young black emergency medical technician, during a no-knock raid in March be arrested. One of those Louisville police officers, Brett Hankison, had his employment terminated earlier this week.

Multi-racial and multi-ethnic protests demanding an end to police violence are continuing throughout the United States. Three North Carolina police officers were fired after a recording captured racist conversations that they had about killing African Americans. Colorado Governor Jared Polis recently stated that his legal council will look into how the state can probe the death of Elijah McClain, a 23-year-old black man who died in police custody last August after officers restrained him by his neck. The police chief in Tucson, Arizona offered to resign Wednesday after body camera video was released showing a two-month-old incident where a Hispanic man died while in police custody.

The American political establishment has continued its cynical political maneuvering around the issue of police violence with the Senate Democrats blocking a package of police reforms proposed by Senate Republicans earlier this week. The Democratic-controlled House of Representatives is reportedly preparing to put forward their own cosmetic police reform bill which they know has no chance of passing the Republican majority Senate.



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