Columbus, Ohio police officer charged in the December killing of Andre Hill

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Adam Coy, a 19-year veteran of the Columbus, Ohio, Division of Police, was arrested on charges of homicide Wednesday in the December 22 killing of Andre Hill, a 47-year-old African American man who was unarmed at the time of the shooting.

Coy, who is white, was suspended and then fired after the December shooting. He has also been charged with dereliction of duty and felonious assault.

Officer Coy and his partner were responding to a complaint from a neighborhood resident, who claimed they had seen a suspicious vehicle in the area.

Coy failed to activate his body camera before the encounter, in violation of department protocols. However, the cameras are programed to record footage 60 seconds before they are turned on, and this fail-safe measure recorded Hill's slaying.

The audio from the first portion of the video is cut out, but it shows Coy and his partner walking up the driveway to the open garage, where Hill was reportedly visiting a friend, with guns and flashlights drawn. Hill slowly and casually walked out of the garage to meet the officers with his cellphone in his left hand, possibly recording the encounter, while his right hand was in his jacket pocket.

Seconds after Hill emerged from the garage Coy opened fire, hitting him four times. It is at this point that officer Coy officially turned his body cam on.

As the officers approached the wounded Hill and turned him over searching for a weapon, he can be heard moaning in agony. Neither officer attempted to perform first aid on their victim. For the next five minutes both walked back out onto the street while they waited for back-up to arrive. Coy can be heard retching and dry heaving, possibly aware that he had just committed murder. When additional police finally arrived, they handcuffed the wounded Hill before transporting him to a hospital, where he died later that night.

Attorney Mark Collins, who is representing Coy, told the media that his client believed Hill was holding a silver revolver in his right hand at the time of the shooting, a claim unsupported by the video footage.

Coy has a documented history of violence going back to 2003, when nine written complaints were lodged against him, four of those in the course of one month. In 2012 he was suspended for 160 hours after dashcam footage showed him assaulting a drunk-driving suspect. Coy punched the driver repeatedly, slammed his head into the hood of the car four times, and threw the suspect on the ground. An investigation later concluded that the driver was not resisting arrest and the city paid $45,000 to settle an excessive force lawsuit related to the incident.

Hill's murder came only three weeks after Columbus police shot and killed unarmed 23-year-old Casey Goodson Jr. as he was unlocking the front door to his house. Police at the time claimed they were hunting a wanted fugitive, and that Goodson's killing was a case of mistaken identity. Goodson was also African American.

Goodson's murder sparked large-scale protests. Though his killing remains under investigation, no charges have been brought so far.

The charging of Coy was a political necessity for Columbus Mayor Andrew Ginther, who tried to head off mass protests by calling for the officer to be fired and prosecuted within days of the incident, and by former police chief Thomas Quinlan, who released a statement soon after the killing stating, "Known facts do not establish that this use of deadly force was objectively reasonable."

Chief Quinlan also stated at the time that other

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officers who responded to the scene were also under investigation for failing to render aid to Hill. In a later written statement to the Columbus Director of Public Safety encouraging the firing of Coy, Quinlan also stated that the police dispatcher "did not provide Officer Coy any indication there was criminal activity occurring or a present danger in the neighborhood. Radio merely advised to check the area for a suspicious vehicle."

Quinlan was demoted by Mayor Ginther on January 28 of this year to deputy chief, the position he had previously held, while the previous deputy chief was appointed to his position in an acting capacity until a replacement is found.

In a further indication that the authorities in Ohio viewed the outcome of Hill's killing as politically hazardous, the grand jury hearings which resulted in the charging of Coy were directly overseen by Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost, who told the *New York Times* that his office acted as a "special prosecutor" in the case.

Neither the police chief, the attorney general, nor the mayor have attempted to give any explanation as to why Coy had continued to work as a police officer despite his documented history of violent conduct.

Columbus officials have pledged to spend $4.5 million on updated body cameras and to install a new nine-member civilian review board to oversee the police. These impotent measures, along with promoting minorities into positions of leadership within police departments, have been put in place in many other communities after police killings of unarmed civilians, particularly in the six years since mass demonstrations erupted after the police murders of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and Eric Garner in New York City. These cosmetic reforms have done nothing to slow the pace of police murders, however, which have averaged around 1,000 a year since 2015.

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