

Grand jury declines to charge Rochester, New York officers who killed Daniel Prude

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On Tuesday, a grand jury declined to charge any of the seven Rochester, New York police officers involved in the brutal murder of 41-year-old Daniel Prude. Prude was in the midst of a mental episode last March when police pinned him to the ground until he stopped breathing. He died at the hospital from complications related to asphyxiation after being pulled from life support.

Police were responding to a call for help from Joe Prude, Daniel's older brother, who was concerned that his brother was having a mental breakdown. Footage of the incident, which police tried to withhold from the public, shows Prude standing naked and delirious in the middle of the street which was covered in melting snow.

Officers pointed a taser at Prude, who was being compliant, and placed him in handcuffs. Police covered his head with a mesh hood, claiming concerns over COVID-19, after he began spitting. When he tried to stand up, police pinned him face down on the ground, pushing his head and back to the pavement. After two minutes, Prude stopped breathing. Medics were able to resuscitate him at the scene, but he died a week later.

According to his family, Daniel Prude grew up in an impoverished household in Chicago, Illinois. Two of his four siblings died in tragic accidents, which deeply impacted him. In September 2018, when he was living with his sister, one of Prude's nephews died by suicide. Afterwards, he increasingly used phencyclidine, or PCP, which triggered a severe decline in his mental health.

Following Prude's death, police employed a series of cover-ups and delay tactics in an attempt to whitewash their crime. A deputy police officer advised then Rochester Police Chief La'Ron Singletary against releasing body camera footage of the incident. A June

police report showed a note that read, "Make him a suspect," referring to an effort to vilify Prude to justify the murder.

An internal investigation found that Singletary and other high-ranking officers actively worked to hide and downplay Prude's murder. On September 8, Singletary, his deputy and a commander all resigned. Two other of the department's highest-ranking officials were demoted. It is worth noting that Singletary, who is black, conspired to cover up the police murder of Prude, who was also black.

Such a fact should immediately discredit the routine calls for police reform, usually involving more funding for "training" and hiring minority officers, that follow highly publicized police murders. Yet, Rochester Mayor Lovely Warren called for residents to put their faith in such reforms in the police department. New York Attorney General Letitia James has said that she will push for changes in the state's use-of-force laws and training on mental health emergencies.

This is wholly unconvincing. For years, "reform" has been the watchword of the Democratic Party regarding police violence. The function of police as guardians of capitalist property relations and social inequality is concealed, and workers are told more oversight and training will stop police brutality. However, despite years of reform—such as the broad implementation of body cameras—police have continued to kill people at a steady rate of three people per day.

According to mappingpoliceviolence.org, police killed 1,127 people in 2020. The number of police killings has been roughly the same number of people every year going back to 2013, when the website first began collecting data.

Tuesday's decision against bringing criminal charges in the Prude killing was made behind closed doors, and

the public has been left in the dark as to how it was reached. Attorney General James was granted a request to release minutes related to the investigation, but even this will not tell the full story.

Hours after learning of the decision, hundreds of protesters gathered at the spot where Prude encountered the police. According to a police statement, protesters marched to the Rochester Police Department headquarters, “climbed over the barricades and gathered at the front door of the building.” No arrests or injuries were reported.

On the same day, Wanda Cooper-Jones, the mother of Ahmaud Arbery, filed a multimillion-dollar civil lawsuit against several people involved in his killing and the subsequent investigation. She filed the lawsuit exactly one year after Arbery’s death near Brunswick in Glynn County, Georgia on February 23, 2020.

The suit states that Gregory and Travis McMichael, father and son, as well as William “Roddie” Bryan, “willfully and maliciously conspired to follow, threaten, detain and kill Ahmaud Arbery.” The three chased Arbery down in pickup trucks as he was jogging, claiming they suspected he was behind a string of robberies. After a short tussle, Arbery was shot twice by the younger McMichael, who carried a shotgun.

The lawsuit also accuses law enforcement officials and local prosecutors of being actively involved in a cover-up of the investigation. Gregory McMichael is a former police officer and had retired as an investigator for the Brunswick Judicial Circuit District Attorney’s Office in 2019.

None of the three men involved in killing Arbery were arrested until video of the incident went viral in May 2020. The second prosecutor to take up the case had advised the police not to make any arrests in the case, declaring Arbery’s killing “justifiable homicide,” before recusing himself when it was revealed his son had worked in the same office as the elder McMichael.

The lawsuit also states the defendants “were motivated to deprive Ahmaud Arbery of equal protection of the law and his rights by racial bias, animus, discrimination.” It also includes complaints of failure to prevent harm and willful misconduct.

Separately, an independent investigation released Monday found that Aurora, Colorado police had no legal basis to stop, frisk and use a chokehold on 23-year-old Elijah McClain. McClain died after being restrained

by police and given a sedative by paramedics in August 2019.

The report stated that police accounts of what transpired do not match the evidence. It states, “body worn camera audio, limited video and ... interviews with the officers tell two contrasting stories. The officers’ statements on the scene and in subsequent recorded interviews suggest a violent and relentless struggle.”

The report added: “The limited video, and the audio from the body worn cameras, reveal Mr McClain surrounded by officers, all larger than he, crying out in pain, apologizing, explaining himself and pleading with the officers.”

McClain was stopped by three officers while he was one his way home from a convenience store. Police had been called about a person wearing a ski mask and waving his arms, which police said made them suspicious. McClain was listening to music, and his family explained that he wore the mask because of a medical condition.

Police claimed McClain refused to stop and fought back when confronted. Body camera video showed him telling officers, “Let go of me. I am an introvert. Please respect the boundaries that I am speaking.”

One officer attempted twice to put McClain in a specialized chokehold, which pressed against his carotid artery and cut off blood to the brain. McClain was held down for 15 minutes before being given 500mg of ketamine. He suffered a cardiac arrest and was declared brain dead on August 27. He died three days later.

The report said department investigators, who questioned the officers involved, “failed to ask basic, critical questions” to determine if their use of force was legal. The report concludes with a recommendation that Aurora police conduct internal reviews.



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