

Notes on Police Violence

Five Oklahoma City police officers charged in fatal November 2020 shooting of 15-year-old

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Five Oklahoma City, Oklahoma police officers have been charged with first-degree manslaughter in the fatal shooting of a teenager last November. The affidavit filed against the officers states they “jointly, willfully, unlawfully and unnecessarily” killed fifteen-year-old Stavian Rodriguez. Court documents indicate Rodriguez was suspected of armed robbery before the incident but was unarmed when officers shot him.

The charges were brought against officers Bethany Sears, Jared Barton, Corey Adams, John Skuta and Brad Pemberton on Tuesday. A sixth officer who was involved in the shooting has not been charged. According to a representative from the Oklahoma City Police Department, all the officers have been placed on paid administrative leave.

The incident occurred on November 23, 2020 when police were responding to a call about an armed robbery at a gas station. The store clerk fled from the scene and locked Rodriguez inside by himself. Numerous officers arrived and set up a perimeter around the gas station.

Rodriguez exited through a drive-thru window after the police commanded him to leave the store. After he exited, officers simultaneously issued various commands to Rodriguez. He raised his right hand and lifted his shirt to show his waistline before removing a firearm from his pants and placing it on the ground, holding it with his thumb and forefinger.

Rodriguez placed his right hand at his waistline and put his left hand in his rear left pocket before the officer who was not charged fired a 40 mm “less-than-lethal” round that hit Rodriguez. The officers subsequently unleashed a hail of bullets on Rodriguez, striking him 13 times.

Security and body camera footage of the incident shows Rodriguez was shot within ten seconds of exiting the building. Officers claimed that Rodriguez made “furtive movements,” but he seemed to be trying to reassure officers that he was unarmed. He had no other weapons on him, and a cellphone was recovered from his back pocket.

Austin officer charged in killing of Michael Ramos

Christopher Taylor, the police officer who shot and killed Michael Ramos last year, was charged with first-degree murder Thursday morning. The Austin Police Department said Thursday afternoon that Taylor is on unpaid administrative leave.

Ramos, 42, was unarmed when he was shot by Taylor in April at an apartment complex.

On April 24, 2020, police responded to a call alleging that a person involved in a drug deal had a gun. A video of the incident shows officers surrounding Ramos’s car and ordering him to exit his vehicle, hold his hands up and lift his shirt.

Ramos exited his car and complied, repeatedly asking officers what was going on and telling them not to shoot because he did not have a gun. Ramos, visibly distressed, slowly backed towards his vehicle before being shot with bean bag ammunition. After being hit, Ramos got into his car and began driving. Taylor shot at Ramos’s moving car, killing him. Officers later confirmed Ramos was not armed.

According to the Travis county District Attorney’s

Office, the charge is the first known incident of an Austin officer being charged with murder in a use of force incident. The last time an Austin officer faced charges in a shooting death was when detective Charles “Trey” Kleinert was charged with manslaughter in the death of Larry Jackson in July 2013. His case was later dismissed.

In recent years, three former police officers in Texas have been convicted of murder. Former Farmers Branch officer Ken Johnson was found guilty for the off-duty shooting of 16-year-old Jose Cruz. Johnson chased Cruz down and shot him after he broke into Johnson’s vehicle. Roy Oliver was convicted of murder in 2018 after shooting at a moving vehicle, killing 15-year-old Jordan Edwards. In 2019, former Dallas police officer Amber Guyger was found guilty of fatally shooting Botham Jean in his own apartment, which she claimed she mistakenly thought was her own.

However, it is still rare for police officers to face charges after killing someone. According to the Police Integrity Research Group, just 104 officers were charged with murder or manslaughter between 2005 and mid-2019. Of these, only 35 were found guilty. Police killed approximately 1,000 people every year during this time frame.

Third-degree murder charge reinstated in Derek Chauvin trial

Hennepin County District Judge Peter Cahill granted prosecution’s request to reinstate a third-degree murder charge against Derek Chauvin, the former Minneapolis police officer that kneeled on George Floyd’s neck last May. Chauvin, who compressed his knee into Floyd’s neck for nearly nine minutes, also faces second-degree murder and manslaughter counts.

In a statement, Cahill said he dismissed the charge last fall because he believed Chauvin’s case did not fit the requirements of Minnesota law. At the time, Cahill stated a third-degree murder charge requires proof that someone’s conduct was “eminently dangerous to others,” not just to Floyd. Cahill said he is now bound by a ruling stemming from the recent conviction of

former officer Mohamed Noor, which stated that third-degree murder can be applied to acts directed toward a single person.



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