

Circumstances still unclear more than a month after college student Samuel Yeager fatally shot by Colorado deputy

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Samuel Yeager, 23, was shot and killed by a Douglas County, Colorado sheriff's deputy on April 3, the day before Easter Sunday. The killing occurred on a freeway exit just outside Castle Pines, south of Denver. It has been justified by the police, who claim that Yeager opened fire on a deputy with an AK-47 rifle.

The still unnamed deputies who were involved in killing the white college student have been placed on administrative leave pending the outcome of an official investigation by the 18th Judicial District Critical Incident Response Team from neighboring Arapahoe County.

On April 6, the sheriff's department released a recording of a 911 call and selectively edited video dashcam and bodycam footage, narrated by Douglas County Sheriff Tony Spurlock. The material that was released raises more questions than answers concerning Yeager's tragic death, and the issue of police killings more generally in the United States.

The 911 caller reported that he had left a "suspicious individual with a gun" on the side of the highway, and that "he's acting crazy." The caller continued: "He has an AK-47 and I had to kick him out of my car because he was scaring me. And he grabbed it and started looking at me and he pointed it at me."

Dashcam footage shows that some time later, a deputy confronted Yeager with his service weapon drawn immediately after exiting his vehicle. The deputy repeatedly shouted at Yeager to put down the soft gun case he was holding at this side, which police would later say had an AK-47 inside. Yeager refused to put the gun case down, insisting that he had a right to carry the gun.

Open carry of most firearms is legal without a permit in Colorado for anyone over the age of 18, except in Denver County, while concealed carry is allowed throughout the state with a permit.

According to Sheriff Spurlock, there were several attempts to get Yeager to put the gun down before he walked away with his hand in the rifle case. Yeager then lay down in a "prone position" and, according to the sheriff's account, removed the rifle from the case, aimed the rifle at the deputy and opened fire. Deputies then returned fire and killed Yeager.

While several shots can be heard on the video, which is narrated by Sheriff Spurlock, there is no footage of Yeager firing at the police, nor does the video show how he was killed by the deputies.

Sheriff Spurlock reported that "out of respect for the suspect's family" the department would not release a full video until the investigation into the shooting had been completed.

An obituary for Yeager posted online by his family explains that he was a student at the University of Colorado Boulder, where he was studying political science after having attended DePauw University in Indiana for two years. The obituary added that he had studied Spanish and German and was a member of the German Honor Society. He was also a member of the Beta Theta Pi fraternity.

"Sam was both interesting and interested; an intrepid explorer, and endlessly curious," the obituary notes. "He sought out opportunities to meet new people and to learn all about them."

Yeager was an outdoorsman who spent time hiking, skiing and boating and volunteered at an organic farm in Boulder. He had also spent time volunteering at a summer camp in Canada, where he led canoe trips. He had also lived in Germany for a year after high school.

Janie Bournival, a longtime friend, remembered Yeager fondly: "Sam was always wanting to seek adventure. He was never afraid to explore more opportunities in life."

Speaking of the shooting, she remarked, “It’s extremely sad for all those impacted.”

While police violence is portrayed in the media and by the Democratic Party entirely as a racial issue—a matter of racist white cops against black victims—victims are of every race and ethnicity, as are their police killers.

Yeager was the 243rd person killed by police this year in the United States and the sixth killed in the state of Colorado, according to a database maintained by the *Washington Post*. All of the victims of police shootings in Colorado so far this year have been white.

According to the *Post*’s data, Yeager was the 219th person killed by police in the state since 2015, meaning that an average of three people have been killed every month in Colorado over a period of more than five years. Colorado has the fifth highest rate of police killings in the country, with 38 deaths per million.

The majority of victims identified by race or ethnicity in this time frame were white (111), followed by Hispanic (56), African American (19), Native American (5) and Asian (5). In keeping with national figures, African Americans were disproportionately killed by the police, making up 4.6 percent of the state’s population but 8.7 percent of victims.

Nearly 13 percent of those killed were exhibiting signs of mental illness, though information about the health condition of victims is likely limited due to the reliance of local reporting on police reports. National data shows that a quarter of police violence victims were suffering from a mental health crisis at the time they were gunned down.

Despite the popular multi-racial protests that have swept the US and many other countries since the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, demanding justice for victims and an end to police violence, little national attention has been given to Yeager’s killing. There is little doubt that because Yeager was white and was accused of firing a gun at deputies, journalists at the *New York Times* have not probed his death and no protests have been called by Black Lives Matter.



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