

One dead, three injured after driver rams police violence protest in Minneapolis, Minnesota

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Deona Marie Erickson, 31, was killed and three people were injured in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Sunday night after a man drove an SUV through a group of demonstrators gathered to protest the killing of Winston Smith by sheriff's deputies working as part of a federal task force on June 3.

In a statement, Minneapolis Police said they were monitoring a protest at the intersection of Lake Street and Girard Avenue when they observed, on camera, a vehicle driving into a group of protesters around 11:39 p.m. on Sunday. A man at the scene said in a Facebook video that people were playing games in the street when the car sped up, crashed through trash cans, and hit another car that then hit Erickson.

The driver, 35-year-old Nicholas David Kraus from neighboring St. Paul, was arrested and is being held without bail on a charge of vehicular manslaughter.

Zachery James told the *New York Times*, protesters had used their own cars to blockade an area of the road and that he and about 50 other people had been “occupying peacefully,” when he heard a vehicle driving towards the group at high speed. When the driver hit one of the parked cars, James said it hit Erickson and sent her flying several yards into a pole.

Erickson was taken to a hospital in very critical condition but was later pronounced dead as a result of her injuries. Three other people suffered non-life-threatening injuries, the police said.

Police said that protesters had pulled Kraus from the car and detained him after the collision until he was taken into custody. Video on social media shows the moment that the suspect driving the vehicle was pulled out of the car. Some protesters hit the driver as he was being removed, police said in a statement, and he also

received treatment at a local hospital.

The statement did not mention a potential motive, but police believe that “the use of drugs or alcohol by the driver may be a contributing factor.” Public records show that Kraus has been convicted of driving while intoxicated five times since 2007, as well as driving without a license, driving without insurance and speeding.

There have been days of protests in Minneapolis over the killing of Smith, who was shot by sheriff's deputies at a parking ramp in the Uptown area of Minneapolis on June 3.

Officials said members of the U.S. Marshals Service Fugitive Task Force were trying to arrest Smith on charges of felony possession of a gun. A Marshals Service statement said Smith, who was in a parked vehicle, did not comply with law enforcement and that they opened fire when he flashed a gun.

Officers from six law enforcement agencies, including Hennepin and Ramsey County sheriff's offices, were part of the task force that attempted to arrest Smith.

The Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension stated two deputies—one from Hennepin County and one from Ramsey County—fired their weapons, striking Smith. State investigators also claimed Smith fired his gun, saying a handgun and a spent cartridge were found inside his car.

State investigators said the names of the two officers who shot Winston will not be released because they were working undercover.

The woman who was on a lunch date with Smith at the time said through her attorneys that she never saw Smith display a gun, contradicting law enforcement's

narrative of the shooting.

“She never saw a gun on Winston Smith, and she never saw a gun inside the vehicle at any time,” Racey Rodne, an attorney for the woman, said during a Thursday news conference.

The attorneys did not release the woman’s name and asked for her privacy to be respected as she recovers from “this profound trauma.” Investigators said the woman had suffered injuries from broken glass resulting from the shooting.

State investigators said there is no video footage of the fatal shooting because the Marshals Service does not allow body cameras for officers on this particular task force. Protesters and Smith’s family raised concerns over the lack of footage and have demanded transparency and accountability.

Meanwhile, Smith’s family honored his memory at a funeral on Saturday. “He was truly a ray of sunshine—the kindest, sweetest, most joyful person,” Tieshia Floyd, Smith’s sister, said at the gathering, according to Minnesota Public Radio.

“Winston was energetic, full of life, always a prankster and very funny,” his family noted in his obituary. “He had a heart of gold, and would help anyone that was in need.” Smith leaves behind two daughters and a son.

His killing came just over a year after the May 25, 2020 police murder of George Floyd sparked mass multiracial protests against police violence across the United States and internationally.

Former Minnesota Officer Derek Chauvin, the officer who held his knee into Floyd’s neck for more than nine minutes, was convicted of manslaughter, third-degree murder and second-degree unintentional murder in April. He is scheduled to be sentenced on June 25 and faces up to 30 years in prison. The trial for the three other officers charged in Floyd’s murder, Thomas Lane, J. Alexander Kueng and Tou Thao, is set to begin March 7, 2022. All four officers will also face charges for federal civil rights violations.



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