Trial of Brooklyn Center, Minnesota police officer who killed Daunte Wright to begin Wednesday

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The trial of former Brooklyn Center, Minnesota police officer Kimberly Potter for the killing of 20-year-old Daunte Wright earlier this year is set to begin Wednesday. Potter is being charged with first degree manslaughter, moved up from second degree manslaughter. The killing sparked protests in the Minneapolis suburb amid the trial of former officer Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020.

Jury selection began on Monday and was finalized last Friday morning. During the selection of the jury, significant efforts were made to vet the jurors based upon their attitude towards race and policing by the Minnesota Judicial Branch. Potter is white and Wright was biracial.

In the lead up to the trial, Brooklyn Center City officials claimed to be preparing for unrest. "Our community is going through a very difficult time," Reggie Edwards, Brooklyn Center City Manager said. "The City of Brooklyn Center remains committed to providing various resources to and prioritizing the safety of our residents, businesses, families and employees throughout the community," he continued. Protests have already begun around the Hennepin County courthouse, where Potter will be on trial in downtown Minneapolis.

Potter fatally shot Wright during a traffic stop in Brooklyn Center on the afternoon of Sunday, April 11. Wright was pulled over by the police for expired vehicle registration tags, and allegedly a warrant for his arrest was discovered during the traffic stop.

From Potter's body camera footage released the following day, Wright is seen making an attempt to get back in his car after Potter and two officers surrounded his vehicle and made an attempt to arrest him. Immediately after Wright sat into his vehicle, Potter drew her firearm and pointed it at him, threatening to use her Taser weapon on him.

Shortly before she fired at him, she exclaimed, "Taser! Taser! Taser!" Following the shooting, Potter can be heard admitting to fatally shooting Wright. "Holy shit, I just shot him." Wright's car then idled into a parked car in front of him with his girlfriend in the car. According to witnesses and Wright's family, his body was left in the street for five hours following his killing.

The killing of Wright occurred during the third week of the trial of former Minneapolis Police officer Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd, and it also occurred just under a year following the murder of Floyd. Protests immediately erupted following the killing of Wright in Brooklyn Center and neighboring cities.

The demonstrations prompted Brooklyn Center Mayor Mike Elliot to call on Minnesota Governor Tim Walz to deploy the National Guard and declare a state of emergency and a 7 p.m. curfew the following nights. Protesters who gathered outside of the Brooklyn Center Police Department were met with riot-gear-clad police officers who attacked and fired at demonstrators, leading to over 79 arrests and multiple demonstrators needing medical attention for their wounds by the following Wednesday.

The circumstances surrounding the killing of Wright and the body camera footage led Brooklyn Center Police Chief Tim Gannon to describe the shooting as an "accidental discharge" during a press conference the following morning. During the press conference,

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Gannon was asked by the local press and community why the police were firing at peaceful protesters, to which he claimed they were simply returning fire.

President Joe Biden also made a statement at the White House the morning following Wright's death aimed at defending the actions of the police in response to demonstrators. Biden stated that, "I'm calling for peace and calm," and that there was "no justification" for violence following the killing. He continued "The question is, was it an accident? Was it intentional?" He then added that an investigation conducted by the Brooklyn Center Police Department would determine this.

Notably, Potter was not named by Gannon or any police or city officials. She was first identified by the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* over a day after the initial killing, citing law enforcement sources. Gannon and Potter both resigned two days after the killing. Despite Gannon's characterization of the killing as an "accidental discharge," Wright's family lawyer, Ben Crump, insisted that it was a case of "intentional, deliberate and unlawful use of force" by the veteran former police officer.

Gannon's claims of "accidental discharge" were also met with anger among the community in Brooklyn Center and Minneapolis, who questioned how a 26-year police veteran such as Potter could confuse her weapons.

According to Mapping Police Violence, an independent research collaborative aimed at collecting data on police killings in the US, at least 960 people have been killed by police in 2021. This database as well as others indicate that the trend of police killing approximately 1,000 people every year has continued for yet another year. The local and national media have made significant efforts to portray the issue of police killings as an entirely racial issue, failing to mention that the largest number of those killed by police are white and the targets of police violence are almost entirely working class and poor.

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