

Protests erupt in Atlanta, Georgia after police fatally shoot fleeing man

By Matthew MacEgan
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Atlanta, Georgia police officers shot and killed a black man who had fallen asleep in the parking lot of a Wendy's fast food restaurant on Friday, sparking protests and the burning of the establishment during a demonstration Saturday night. Within 24 hours of the killing, the city's police chief announced that she was stepping down from her position in response and the department stated that the officer who fired the lethal shots had been fired.

Police officers were called to the Wendy's restaurant in South Atlanta after Rayshard Brooks, 27, had passed out in his vehicle in the drive-thru lane, causing other customers drive around his vehicle to make their orders.

Officers Garrett Rolfe and Devin Brosnan arrived on the scene and performed a sobriety test on Brooks, which was recorded on video by a witness who was in line at the restaurant. The interaction between Brooks and the officers can also be viewed through police bodycam and dashcam video released publicly by the Atlanta Police Department (APD). According to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI), Brooks failed the sobriety test, at which time the officers attempted to take him into custody.

Bodycam footage of Rayshard Brooks moments before being gunned down.

Brosnan's bodycam recorded a peaceful interchange between himself and Brooks, prior to Rolfe's arrival on the scene, where Brooks related that he had just celebrated the birthday of one of his daughters the day prior.

Dashcam footage from Rolfe's vehicle shows Brooks began struggling with the officers once they attempted to handcuff him. Video recorded by a second bystander shows that Brosnan drew his Taser, which Brooks then grasped while the two officers sought to wrestle him to

the ground. Brooks continued his attempt to wriggle away from the two officers, punching Rolfe in the head before slipping out of their grasp while wresting away Brosnan's Taser. Rolfe then stood and fired his own Taser into Brooks, who turned and ran away from the two officers with Rolfe's Taser wire still attached to his body and Brosnan's Taser in hand.

Security camera footage obtained from the restaurant shows Officer Rolfe chasing Brooks and then shifting his Taser to his left hand so that he could draw his handgun with his right hand. The video then shows Brooks looking back while running and, while in full stride away from the pursuing officer, pointing the Taser wildly behind himself and firing. The flash of the Taser suggests that the discharge did not strike Rolfe.

The security camera footage shows that Rolfe then dropped his own Taser, pointed his handgun, and rapidly fired three shots into Brooks while he was running away. Video shows the young father of four falling to the ground and both officers standing over him, injured but still making movements on the ground. Witnesses have stated that before administering any aid to Brooks, the officers put on gloves and collected the shell casings.

Surveillance footage of the shooting of Rayshard Brooks.[Screenshot Georgia Bureau of Investigations]

Surveillance video shows that the officers waited two minutes and 16 seconds before they attempted to provide medical aid to Brooks. A few minutes later, an ambulance arrived, which took Brooks to a hospital, where he was declared dead after emergency surgery. Rolfe's bodycam video shows him asking another officer on the scene if there was any word on the condition of Brooks.

Attorneys for Brooks' family say that he left behind three daughters and a stepson.

Attorney Chris Stewart spoke to reporters over the weekend, posing the question, “Are you not tired of seeing cases like this happen? Deadly force should have never come into the equation. [The officer] had other options instead of shooting him in the back.” The police officers already had Brooks’ ID and address, so they could have easily tracked him down had he eluded them.

Stewart has also pointed out that police officers have claimed in the past that a Taser is not a deadly weapon, and that, by this logic, there was no reason to use deadly force. “I have cases where officers used Tasers on victims and they argue with us in court that Tasers aren’t deadly. You cannot have it both ways.”

Fulton County District Attorney Paul Howard told CNN Sunday that a decision by his office on whether to bring criminal charges against Brosnan and Rolfe would come by Wednesday. “[Brooks] did not seem to present any kind of threat to anyone, and so the fact that it would escalate to his death just seems unreasonable,” Howard said.

Protesters flooded the streets of southeast Atlanta on Saturday, angry over the killing of Brooks, and surrounded the Wendy’s where the shooting took place. In the evening, the crowd marched to Interstate 75/85, bringing the major thoroughfare to a standstill. The Wendy’s restaurant was in flames later that night, and fire was also set to automobiles near the fast food chain. Police earlier in the day used tear gas and a flash bang to try to clear the crowd.

Officer Rolfe, who had been employed with the department since 2013, was fired around midnight on Friday night, and Officer Brosnan, who has been with the department for less than two years, was placed on administrative duty. Democratic Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms called for the dismissal of Rolfe and announced that Police Chief Erika Shields would no longer be running the department.

“Chief Erika Shields has been a solid member of APD for over two decades and has a deep and abiding love for the people of Atlanta,” Bottoms said in a statement. “And because of her desire that Atlanta be a model of what meaningful reform should look like across the country, Chief Shields has offered to immediately step aside as police chief so that the city may move forward with urgency in rebuilding the trust so desperately needed throughout our community.”

Last month Bottoms denounced the “very diverse crowd” that had been protesting police brutality in Atlanta and labeled the large numbers of white people participating in the protests as “outsiders.” While speaking from one side of her mouth about “rebuilding trust,” from the other she issues calls for the repression of mass popular outrage against police violence.

Stacey Abrams, the former Georgia gubernatorial candidate and a leading Democratic Party proponent of racist identity politics, tweeted that Atlanta needs to “severely restrict the use of deadly force. Yes, investigations must be called for—but so too should accountability.”

The statements of both Bottoms and Abrams, who are both considered serious contenders to be chosen as a running mate for former Vice President Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, show that they are not even on the same spectrum as the masses of people around the world who have been protesting police violence day after day since the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25.

While protesters are calling for an end to police killings and many support the defunding of police rather than their reform, Democrats such as Bottoms and Abrams push for “diversifying” law enforcement with more black police officers and chiefs and in fact increasing the amount of money going to the repressive arm of the state.

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