

“You’re trying to kill me”

Rochester, New York police tortured and murdered a man in March, video shows

By Samuel Davidson
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“You’re trying to kill me,” were some of the last understandable words spoken by Daniel Prude, a 41-year-old African American man, as seven police pressed his hooded head down to the pavement, covering his nose and mouth with their hands.

Footage from body-cam video shows police torturing Prude for several minutes while he lay naked, handcuffed and hooded on a freezing Rochester, New York, street on March 23.

The video, released this week by lawyers for Prude’s family, shows Prude, who was having a mental health episode, complying with police orders to lie face down and prone on the pavement with his hands behind his back.

Since the release of the video, the seven officers involved have been suspended with pay. Prude’s family is calling for their arrest.

The video shows that police handcuff Prude so tightly that his wrists began to bleed. Four officers are seen walking around him as he lay face down on the cold pavement, other police are heard off camera.

One officer tells him he is being arrested for breaking a window, but no attempt is made to move him to a police car, or put a blanket over him or between him and the freezing cold pavement.

The police are seen smiling and one is heard laughing as Prude, still on the street, tries to arch his body away from the pavement. Officers taunted their black victim, with one telling him that his skin had turned white from the cold.

At one point, Prude rolled over and sat up, still naked and handcuffed. The video shows that for over four minutes police made no effort to move him to a patrol car or provide him with a blanket or jacket.

While Prude was talking to the three or four officers in front of him, another officer walked up behind him and without any warning slipped a hood over Prude’s head, preventing him from seeing.

Left sitting, naked on the street, with his arms handcuffed behind his back and a hood over his head, Prude began to cry out and get more and more upset as he was being tormented by the police.

After another two minutes, three or four officers pushed Prude over and slammed his head into the pavement. One officer placed his knee on Prude’s back and at least two officers held his head down with their hands on his face covering Prude’s nose and mouth with the hood.

Prude’s words became muffled as he begged for his life. “You’re trying to kill me,” are the last understandable words he said. Throughout the video officers can be heard laughing and joking about his situation.

Even after an ambulance arrived to provide aid, the police did not release Prude from this position and no attempt was made to provide medical attention. Prude was held on the ground for nearly three minutes.

As he became unconscious the medics were brought over but one of the officers continues to hold his head to the ground with his hands on his face. One of the medics noted that Prude’s body was very cold and asks if they have taken his temperature. One cop noted that it is freezing out and that he has been out for 30 minutes.

The medics finally began to perform CPR as they moved him to a stretcher and took him to a nearby hospital.

Despite the efforts of doctors, Prude never regained

consciousness and he died seven days later. The medical examiner ruled it a homicide by asphyxiation. “Complications of asphyxia in the setting of physical restraint,” the report said.

“I placed a phone call for my brother to get help,” Joe Prude, Daniel’s brother, said at a press conference Wednesday, “Not for my brother to get lynched.”

“When I see that he was lynched, that was a full-fledged ongoing murder, cold-blooded. Nothing other than cold-blooded murder. The man is defenseless, butt naked on the ground, he is cuffed up already.”

A resident of Chicago, Daniel Prude had come to Rochester to visit his brother and family. Joe said he was concerned when his brother was talking of killing himself and went out in the early morning.

Tashyra Prude, Daniel’s 18-year-old daughter, in a video statement posted by the *Guardian* said, “When I see the video, I heard the officers tell my father to get on the ground, and he said ‘okay sure’ and he got down. They said, ‘put your hands behind your back’ and he put his hands behind his back. They laid him flat on his stomach with no problem.

“My father did not resist, he did not fight, I don’t understand how anybody could say or feel that he was a threat to the police when he complied with all orders.

“This is wrong, this is unjust and it has happened too many times. We all loved our father, I loved our father dearly, to see him in that state is heartbreaking. To this day, I’m still waiting for him to call me and say ‘I’m coming home.’”

There is no official national count of people who have been killed by police or while in police custody. However, the Killed by Police website, which gathers the information from local news accounts, lists 680 people so far this year placing the US on track to have over 1,000 people murdered by police by the end of this year.

The website notes that this is an undercount as they do not necessarily see all the accounts, or many may never make it into the papers. Daniel’s death is not listed as he died seven days after his encounter with the police.

Protests erupted throughout the United States and around the world in May after George Floyd was killed by a police officer pressing his knee into Floyd’s neck for over 8 minutes.

The murder of Daniel Prude is an exposure of the claims that having more black mayors, police and other city officials will help prevent such murders.

Rochester Mayor Lovely Warren, Police Chief La’Ron Singletary and Deputy Chief Mark Simmons are all African-American. Of the nine city councilmembers, five are black and one is Latino; three are women.

The body-cam video was only released by attorneys for Prude’s family five months after his murder. Warren, Singletary and Simmons all sought to conceal the tapes which expose the brutality of their police department. The seven officers involved in the murder were allowed to remain on duty until the family made the video public. Now Warren is trying to divert people’s anger with proposals to require newly hired police to live within Rochester’s city limits.

Rochester, along with much of upstate New York, is mired in poverty. Childhood poverty in the city exceeded 56 percent in 2017, falling only a few percentage points since then. Xerox and Kodak, both of which once employed tens of thousands of workers in Rochester, have all but ceased to exist.

As in many former industrial cities, decent housing and schools are in short supply and the opioid drug epidemic is taking a massive toll. The coronavirus pandemic has only compounded these problems.

Under conditions of growing inequality and social unrest the true role of the police as defenders of the ruling elite and the entire capitalist system is becoming evident.

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