

Officer who fatally shot Philando Castile in Minnesota acquitted on all charges

By Anthony Bertolt
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Jeronimo Yanez, the police officer who brutally shot and killed Philando Castile last year during a traffic stop in Falcon Heights, Minnesota, has been found not guilty on all counts.

Yanez was charged with second degree manslaughter and two counts of discharging a deadly weapon. The trial, which began on May 30, ended after five days of deliberation by the jury. Immediately following the decision, protesters gathered all over the Twin Cities, including 1,500 at the state capitol.

Castile was killed after Yanez fired seven shots into his vehicle on July 6, 2016, during a traffic stop from a broken tail light. His girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds, and 4-year-old daughter were also in the car at the time.

Yanez said that Castile matched the description of a robbery suspect, telling another officer before the shooting that he had a “wide-set nose” and a broken taillight. Yanez also claimed in court that he feared for his life and thought that Castile as reaching for a gun—even after Castile told the police officer that he had a permit for a weapon and had one in his possession, as is required by gun safety procedures.

Reynolds broadcast a Facebook live video immediately after the shooting, in which she questioned the officer and managed to capture Castile’s last words.

Castile’s mother responded to the murder with outrage. “My son loved this city, and this city killed my son. And a murderer gets away. Are you kidding me right now?”

Castile’s killing occurred around the same time as the murder of Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, which was also caught on video. Their murders sparked mass protests around demands to punish the officers responsible and end police violence.

Many in the media presented the trial of Yanez as a

step towards ending police violence. In fact, if Reynolds had not recorded the aftermath of the killing, the case would likely never have gone to trial. Police kill more than 1,000 people every year in the United States. Only on the rarest of occasions is a police officer prosecuted, and convictions almost never result.

Yanez’s acquittal is part of a broader trend—from Darren Wilson, the officer who murdered 18-year-old Michael Brown, to Daniel Pantaleo, the officer who strangled Eric Garner to death.

This was the norm during the Obama administration, which oversaw the rise in police murder of working class people throughout the country. The Trump administration has made a point of insisting that even the most minimal restraints on police violence will be removed, and therefore, police murders will continue.

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