

Shooting of Alton Sterling

On July 5, 2016, **Alton Sterling**, a 37-year-old black man, was shot several times at close range while held down on the ground by two Baton Rouge Police Department officers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The officers were attempting to control Sterling's arms and he was shot after reportedly reaching for a gun in his pocket.^[3] Police were responding to a report that a man in a red shirt was selling CDs, and that he had used a gun to threaten a man outside a convenience store.^[4] The shooting was recorded by multiple bystanders.

The shooting led to protests in Baton Rouge and a request for a civil rights investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice.

The Department of Justice investigated but in May 2017 decided that it would not file criminal charges against the police officers. After this decision was made by the Department of Justice, Louisiana's attorney general, Jeff Landry, said that the state of Louisiana would open an investigation into the shooting once the Department of Justice releases the physical evidence. In March 2018, Landry's office announced it would not bring charges against the officers^[5] stating that they acted in a "reasonable and justifiable manner."^[6]

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Sterling during altercation

Date	July 5, 2016
Time	12:35 a.m.
Duration	90 seconds
Location	2112 North Foster Drive, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, United States
Coordinates	30°28′05″N 91°08′22″W﻿ / ﻿
Also known as	CD Man
Type	Shooting
Filmed by	Bystander's cell phone and security cameras
Participants	Howie Lake II, Blane Salamoni (officers)
Outcome	Under state investigation
Deaths	Alton Sterling
Charges	No federal charges filed; ^[1] state charges pending

Alton Sterling (June 14, 1979 – July 5, 2016) was known locally in Baton Rouge as "CD Man."^[7] He had a criminal record that included violent offenses; a 2009 affidavit of probable cause that said he resisted arrest and, a "black semi auto gun fell from his waistband" as the arresting officer wrestled him on the ground.^[8] The arresting officers were not aware of Alton Sterling's record at the time of the shooting.^[9]

Litigation	Lawsuit against city of Baton Rouge, Baton Rouge Police Department and officers pending ^[2]
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The owner of the store where the shooting occurred said that Sterling had started carrying a gun a few days prior to the event as other CD vendors had been robbed recently. He also said that Sterling was "not the one causing trouble" during the situation that led to the police being called.^[10] At the time of his death, Sterling was 37 years old.^{[7][11]}

Police

The police officers involved in the shooting were Howie Lake II and Blane Salamoni. Lake had three years of law enforcement experience which included a previous shooting of an African American male. He was subsequently placed on a department-mandated leave; Salamoni had four years of experience.^[12] Salamoni and Lake had both been previously investigated and cleared by their department for allegedly having used excessive force.^[13]

Shooting

At 12:35 a.m., at 2112 North Foster Drive in the parking lot of Triple S Food Mart, Sterling was detained by Baton Rouge Police Department officers. This came after an anonymous caller reported that a man was threatening him and waving a handgun while in the process of selling CDs.^{[14][15]} The officers tased Sterling for resisting several times,^{[16][17]} then forced the heavy-set man to the hood of a sedan and then to the ground. Sterling was pinned to the ground by both officers; one kneeling on his chest and the other on his thigh, both attempting to control his arms.^[16]

One officer exclaimed, "He's got a gun! Gun!" One of the officers yelled, "If you fucking move, I swear to God!" Then Salamoni was heard on the video saying, "Lake, he's going for the gun!" One of the officers aimed his gun at Sterling's body, then three gunshots were heard. The camera panned away just before the camera panned back and three more gunshots were heard. The police officer sitting on Sterling's chest was not in the picture and the other officer who drew the gun, was about 3 feet (0.9 m) away. His gun was pointed on Sterling, who had a gunshot wound in his chest.^[18] The officers retrieved a loaded .38 caliber revolver from Sterling's front pants pocket.^{[19][20]} The officers then radioed for Emergency Medical Services.^{[10][19]}

According to Parish Coroner William Clark of East Baton Rouge, a preliminary autopsy, on July 5, indicated that Sterling had died from multiple gunshot wounds to his chest and back.^[21]

Multiple bystanders' cell phones captured videos of the shooting as well as store surveillance cameras and officer body cameras.^[22] One of the bystander's videos was filmed by a group called "Stop the Killing," which listens to police scanners and films crimes in progress. They also listen to police interactions in an effort to reduce violence in the community.^[23] A second video was made available the day after the shooting by the store owner and eyewitness,^{[17][24]}



The Triple S Food Market in Baton Rouge, where Sterling was shot by the Baton Rouge Police

who said in a statement to [NBC News](#), "Sterling never wielded the gun or threatened the officers."^[17]

Aftermath and reactions

On the night of July 5, more than 100 demonstrators in Baton Rouge shouted "no justice, no peace," set off fireworks, and blocked an intersection to protest Sterling's death.^[25] Flowers and messages were left at the place of his death. The police cleared a crowd of about 200 people as organizers announced they would regroup in front of City Hall.^[26]

On July 6, [Black Lives Matter](#) held a [candlelight vigil](#) in Baton Rouge, with chants of "We love Baton Rouge" and, called for justice.^[27]

Speaking shortly after the shootings of Sterling and [Philando Castile](#), President [Barack Obama](#) did not comment on the specific incidents. Obama called upon the U.S. to "do better." He also said "Americans should feel outraged at episodes of police brutality since they're rooted in long-simmering racial discord."^{[28][29]}

On July 7, a protest was held in [Dallas](#), Texas, relating to this shooting of Sterling and Castile on July 6. At the end of the peaceful protest, Micah Xavier Johnson [opened fire in an ambush](#), killing five police officers and wounding eleven others including two civilians. Johnson was then killed by a robot-delivered bomb.

Also, on July 7, the [FBI's New Orleans](#) field office issued a warning about "threats to law enforcement and potential threats to the safety of the general public," stemming from the death of Sterling.^[30]

Following the shootings of Sterling, Castile, and Dallas police officers, the [Bahamian](#) government issued a travel advisory. Bahamian citizens were told to use caution when traveling to the U.S. due to racial tensions. They specifically advised that young men use "extreme caution" when interacting with police, to be non-confrontational and cooperative.^{[31][32]} Similar advisories were issued by the governments of [United Arab Emirates](#) and [Bahrain](#), days later.^{[33][34]}

On July 8, the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent issued a statement strongly condemning Sterling and Castile's killings. Human rights expert Ricardo A. Sunga III, the current Chair of the United Nations panel, stated that the killings demonstrate "a high level of [structural](#) and [institutional](#) racism. Adding that "The United States is far from recognizing the same rights for all its citizens. Existing measures to address racist crimes motivated by prejudice are insufficient and have failed to stop the killings".^{[35][36]}

On July 9, a protest in Baton Rouge turned violent, with one police officer having several teeth knocked out and eight firearms (including three rifles, three shotguns, and two pistols) being confiscated from [New Black Panther Party](#) members.^[37] Police arrested 102 people.^[38]

On July 10, between 30 and 40 people were also arrested including African-American Muslim activist [Blair Imani](#).^[39]



Mural in memory of Alton Sterling that was painted outside the Triple S Food Mart in the days after his killing



Second memorial for Alton Sterling near the Triple S Food Mart

Professor Peniel E. Joseph, founding director of the Center for the Study of Race and Democracy at Tufts University, said that "the deaths of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile evoke the past spectacle of lynching and that for change to happen, Americans must confront the pain of black history."^[40]

On July 11, a home in Baton Rouge was raided in connection with a pawn shop burglary in which seven or eight guns and ammunition were stolen. Three people were arrested during the raid, one of whom said the group was planning on using the stolen firearms to shoot police officers at protests.^[41]

On July 13, local organizing groups and the American Civil Liberties Union's Louisiana branch, filed a lawsuit against the Baton Rouge Police Department for violating the First Amendment rights of demonstrators. They claim they were protesting peacefully against Sterling's death.^[42]

On July 17, Gavin Eugene Long shot and killed three police officers and wounded several others in Baton Rouge. Long was killed at the scene during a shootout with responding officers. The shooting has been linked to the nationwide tension over race and policing, with the event happening days after Sterling's death in the same city.^{[43][44]}

Investigation

Louisiana U.S. Representative Cedric Richmond said that the footage of Sterling's shooting is "deeply troubling" and called for a U.S. Department of Justice investigation into the man's death.^[45] Governor John Bel Edwards announced on July 6, that the Department of Justice would launch an investigation.^[46]

The United States Department of Justice opened a civil rights investigation on July 7, 2016.^[47] On May 2, 2017, it was subsequently announced the department would not bring charges against the officers involved.^{[48][49]}

After the Department of Justice announced that it would not charge the 2 officers, Louisiana attorney general Jeff Landry announced that the state of Louisiana would begin an investigation. In a statement, Landry wrote "The USDOJ's review of this matter was to determine violations of federal law: specifically, federal civil rights laws. To date, this matter has not been investigated or reviewed for possible violations of the Louisiana Criminal Code. Therefore, this matter now needs to be investigated for possible state criminal violations."

See also

- List of killings by law enforcement officers in the United States

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External links

- [Video of the shooting \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CaAik-Evl3o\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CaAik-Evl3o) on [YouTube](#)
 - [Another video of the shooting, made by the convenience store owner \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ckuUk9R5ES0\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ckuUk9R5ES0) on [YouTube](#)
 - [US President Obama: speech on the shootings of Sterling and Philando Castile \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LL3tRgsqMmw\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LL3tRgsqMmw) on [YouTube](#)
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