

U.S.

# After Philando Castile's Killing, Obama Calls Police Shootings 'an American Issue'

By MATT FURBER and RICHARD PÉREZ-PEÑA JULY 7, 2016

ST. PAUL — President Obama, reacting with the same horror as many Americans to a grisly video of a bloody, dying man in Minnesota who was shot by the police, begged the nation to confront the racial disparities in law enforcement while acknowledging the dangers that officers face.

“When incidents like this occur, there’s a big chunk of our citizenry that feels as if, because of the color of their skin, they are not being treated the same, and that hurts, and that should trouble all of us,” Mr. Obama said in a statement on Thursday after arriving in Warsaw for a NATO summit. “This is not just a black issue, not just a Hispanic issue. This is an American issue that we all should care about.”

A few hours earlier, Gov. Mark Dayton of Minnesota, who seemed shaken by the video showing the man, Philando Castile, as he died, also pointed to the role of race. “Would this have happened if the driver were white, if the passengers were white?” he asked. “I don’t think it would have.”



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shooting, which his girlfriend had narrated as they occurred live on Facebook. There were demonstrations and a vigil for Mr. Castile, with appearances by members of his family, in St. Paul.

But the shooting reverberated far beyond the state. In Dallas, gunfire broke out Thursday evening at a demonstration, turning a vocal but peaceful rally into chaos as two snipers shot at police officers, killing five of them, the police said.

Mr. Dayton and members of Minnesota's congressional delegation asked for the Justice Department to investigate the death of Mr. Castile, 32, who died hours after the department took over the investigation into the fatal police shooting, also captured on video, in Baton Rouge, La. The governor said he had spoken with White House and Justice Department officials.

But the department responded that for now, it would leave the investigation to the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension and would offer assistance.

The shootings in Louisiana and Minnesota follow a long string of deaths of black people at the hands of the police — in Staten Island; Cleveland; Baltimore; Ferguson, Mo.; and North Charleston, S.C., among others — that have stoked outrage around the country. The encounters, many of them at least partly caught on video, have led to intense debate about race relations and law enforcement.

Mr. Obama, in Warsaw, said he felt compelled to follow up a Facebook message with a personal statement about the killings, though he said he could not comment directly on them. "But what I can say is that all of us, as Americans, should be troubled by these shootings, because these are not isolated incidents," he said. "They're symptomatic of a broader set of racial disparities that exist in our criminal justice system."

The president cited the nation's tortured racial history and current statistics on unequal treatment of the races. Sounding wistful, he said, "maybe in my children's lifetimes, all the vestiges of that past will have been cured."

who was recording the scene. As she did so, her 4-year-old daughter sat in the back seat and an officer stood just outside the driver's side window, still aiming his gun at the mortally wounded man at point-blank range.

The video is all the more shocking for the calm, clear narration of the woman, **Diamond Reynolds**, and the fact that she was streaming it live on Facebook. On the video, Ms. Reynolds, who said Mr. Castile was her boyfriend, gives her account of what happened, saying again and again that he had informed the officer that he was carrying a gun, and that he was just reaching for his driver's license and registration — as the officer had requested — when the officer opened fire. She estimated, at various times, that three, four or five shots were fired.

"Please, Officer, don't tell me that you just did this to him," she said. "You shot four bullets into him, sir. He was just getting his license and registration, sir."

Ms. Reynolds's daughter appears several times in the video. Near the end of the 10-minute clip, as the two are sitting in the back of a police car and Ms. Reynolds becomes increasingly distraught, the girl comforts her mother. "It's O.K., Mommy," she says. "It's O.K. I'm right here with you."

Late Thursday night, Minnesota authorities identified the officer who fired as **Jeronimo Yanez**. They said he is on administrative leave as the investigation continues. Another officer who did not shoot but was on the scene is also on leave.

The Hennepin County Medical Examiner's office ruled Mr. Castile's manner of death to be a homicide, meaning he was killed by another person.

In a short statement, the medical examiner said Mr. Castile sustained multiple gunshot wounds and died at 9:37 p.m. in a hospital emergency room, about 20 minutes after he was shot.

Mr. Castile had worked in the nutrition services department of St. Paul Public Schools since 2002, and became a supervisor two years ago, the district said in a statement. In recent years, he worked at J. J. Hill Montessori Magnet School, which

Johnson, a first cousin of Mr. Castile's. "This kid has never been in an argument. You could try to argue with him, and he was so nonconfrontational that he'd just laugh."

Danny Givens, a nondenominational pastor who said he was a friend of Mr. Castile's, said, "Philando was a very even-keeled man, good-hearted, personable, smile would light up a room, eyes that just speak volumes of love."

In its statement, the school district said: "He had a cheerful disposition and his colleagues enjoyed working with him. He was quick to greet former co-workers with a smile and hug."

In the day after the shooting, Ms. Reynolds and her video supplied the only public accounts of the lethal encounter. Officials said they could not offer any details, though they did confirm that a gun — presumably Mr. Castile's — was recovered from the scene.

Mona Dohman, the state commissioner of public safety, who oversees the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, declined to say whether Mr. Castile had a permit to carry a concealed firearm.

Mr. Dayton said he was struck by the fact that the video did not show officers making any attempt to render first aid to the dying man, but that they handcuffed Ms. Reynolds and placed her and her daughter in the back of a police car. "The stark treatment I find just absolutely appalling at all levels," he said.

The video of the shooting passed rapidly among Twitter, Facebook and YouTube users, becoming significant news online. The terms #FalconHeightsShooting and #PhilandoCastile were trending on Twitter as news of the encounter spread.

Another day, another hashtag. You didn't deserve this, brother. You didn't deserve this.

#PhilandoCastile

— NE-YO (@NeYoCompound) July 7, 2016



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Speaking to reporters on Thursday morning, Ms. Reynolds said that Mr. Castile, had just come from having his hair done for his birthday when they were pulled over on Larpenteur Avenue, a major thoroughfare through Falcon Heights, a predominantly white and middle-class city of 5,500 residents. The two officers who stopped them were from the nearby city of St. Anthony, which provides police services under contract to Falcon Heights. One officer approached Mr. Castile, who was driving, and said he had a broken taillight, Ms. Reynolds said.

“He tells us to put our hands in the air, we have our hands in the air,” she said. “At the time as our hands is in the air, he asked for license and registration,” which Mr. Castile carried in a wallet in his back pocket.

As he is reaching for his back pocket wallet, to produce his license and registration, “he lets the officer know, ‘Officer, I have a firearm on me,’ ” she said. “I began to yell, ‘But he’s licensed to carry.’ After that, he began to take off shots — bah, bah, bah, bah, ‘Don’t move! Don’t move!’ But how can you not move when you’re asking for license and registration? It’s either you want my hands in the air or you want my identification.”

The video, some versions of which were reversed, making it appear that Mr. Castile was in the passenger seat, begins with images of Mr. Castile, who appears to be moaning and moving slightly, his left arm and left side bloody. Ms. Reynolds, who uses the name Lavish Reynolds on Facebook, then pans the camera to her face and says matter-of-factly, “They killed my boyfriend.” In the background, one of the officers can be heard shouting: “I told him not to reach for it. I told him to get his hands up.”

Mr. Castile’s mother, Valerie Castile, told CNN that she had taught her son to be extremely cautious when encountering members of law enforcement. “If you get stopped by the police, comply,” Ms. Castile said. “Comply, comply, comply.”

“My son was a law-abiding citizen, and he did nothing wrong,” she said. “He’s no thug.”



**Correction: July 7, 2016**

*An earlier version of this article incorrectly described the beginning of the video shot in Falcon Heights, Minn. It shows the aftermath of the shooting; it does not show the shooting itself.*

Matt Furber reported from St. Paul, and Richard Pérez-Peña from New York. Reporting was contributed by Christina Capecchi from St. Paul, Jonah Engel Bromwich and Michael McPhate from New York, Gardiner Harris from Washington and Mitch Smith from Minnesota.

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