Shooting of Walter Scott

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Coordinates: 32.8982°N 80.0145°W

The **shooting of Walter Scott** occurred on April 4, 2015, in North Charleston, South Carolina, following a daytime traffic stop for a non-functioning brake light. Scott, a black man, was fatally shot by Michael Slager, a white North Charleston police officer. Slager was charged with murder after a video surfaced contradicting his police report. The video showed him shooting the unarmed Scott from behind while Scott was fleeing.

The case was independently investigated by the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED). The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Office of the United States Attorney for the District of South Carolina, and the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division are conducting their own investigations. On June 8, a grand jury indicted police officer Slager on a charge of murder.

Shooting of Walter Scott

Screenshot of phone video taken by eyewitness Feidin Santana, showing Officer Michael Slager shooting Walter Scott

Time	9:30 a.m. (EDT)
Date	April 4, 2015
Location	North Charleston, South Carolina, U.S.
Coordinates	32.89926°N 80.01394°W (traffic stop) 32.8982°N 80.0145°W (shooting)
Filmed by	Feidin Santana
Deaths	Walter Scott
Accused	Michael Slager
Charges	Murder

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Backgrounds [edit]

Walter Scott [edit]

Walter Lamar Scott[note 1] (February 9, 1965 – April 4, 2015),[2] a 50-year-old black man, was a forklift operator, studying massage therapy.[3][4][5] Scott previously served two years in the U.S. Coast Guard before being given a general discharge in 1986 for a drug-related incident.[6]

Scott's police record listed ten arrests: for contempt of court regarding failure to pay child support or to appear for court hearings; he was arrested in 1987 on an assault and battery charge and convicted in 1991 for possession of a bludgeon.[7]

Scott during his service in the U.S. Coast Guard in the mid-1980s

Michael Slager [edit]

Slager in an undated official NCPD photo

Michael Thomas Slager (born November 14, 1981),[8] a 33-year old white police officer originally from New Jersey, served in the North Charleston Police Department (NCPD) for five years and five months prior to the shooting. Before becoming a police officer, he served in the U.S. Coast Guard.[9]

Slager was named in a police complaint in 2013 for allegedly using a taser on a man without cause. Slager was cleared over the incident; the victim and several witnesses said they were not interviewed. Following the Scott shooting, North Charleston police stated they would re-review the 2013 complaint.[10] Slager was named in a second tasing-without-cause complaint following an August 2014 police stop.[11] A complaint filed in January 2015 resulted in Slager being cited for failing to file a report.[9]

Personnel documents describe Slager as having demonstrated "great officer safety tactics" in dealing with suspects, and note his proficiency with a Taser.[9]

Location [edit]

Local residents have complained that policing in North Charleston includes the harassment and racial profiling of African Americans, including frequent use of Tasers without cause.[12][13] In North Charleston, whites make up 37% of the population, but the police department is 80% white.[14]

Shooting [edit]

At 9:30 a.m., April 4, 2015, in the parking lot of an auto parts store at 1945 Remount Road,[15] Slager stopped Scott for a non-functioning third brake light.[16] Scott was driving a 1991 Mercedes, and, according to his brother, was headed to the auto parts store when he was stopped.[17] The video from Slager's dashcam shows him approaching Scott's car, speaking to Scott, and then returning to his patrol car. Scott exited his car and fled with Slager giving chase on foot.[18][19]

Slager pursued Scott to a lot behind a pawn shop at 5654 Rivers Avenue,[15] and the two became involved in a physical altercation. According to the incident report and city officials, Slager then fired his Taser, hitting Scott.[20] Scott fled, and Slager drew his handgun, firing eight rounds at him from behind.[7] According to a lawyer for Scott's family, the coroner had reported to him that Scott was struck a total of five times: three times in the back, once in the upper buttocks, and once on one of his ears, with one bullet entering his heart. Official autopsy reports have not been released.[7]

Immediately following the shooting, Slager radioed a dispatcher, stating, "Shots fired and the subject is down. He took my Taser."[20]

When Slager fired his gun, Scott was approximately 15 to 20 feet (5 to 6 m) away and fleeing.[7] In the report of the shooting filed before the video surfaced, Slager said he had feared for his life because Scott had taken his Taser,[7] and that he shot Scott because he "felt threatened".[21]

A passenger in Scott's car was later detained and placed in the back of a police vehicle.[22]

Court documents reveal that Scott was under the influence of cocaine and alcohol at the time of the incident.[23]

Eyewitness video [edit]

External video

Traffic stop
Shooting

An eyewitness to the shooting, Feidin Santana, recorded video of the incident on his phone.[24] At first Santana did not share the video out of fear of retribution by the police department, but he became angered when the police report differed from his view of the events.[25][26] In an interview on MSNBC, Santana said, "I felt that my life, with this information, might be in danger. I thought about erasing the video and just getting out of the community, you know Charleston, and living some place else."[27] The video was subsequently shared with Scott's family through an activist of Black Lives Matter, and later with the news media.[24][28]

Santana said that after a struggle in which Slager deployed his Taser, Scott was "just trying to get away from the Taser," and that before he started recording he observed that Slager "had control of the situation."[29] In an interview on *The Today Show*, Santana said Scott "never grabbed the Taser of the police. He never got the Taser."[30][31][32]

After Scott dropped to the ground, Slager approached him, repeatedly instructed him to place his hands behind his back, and handcuffed him, leaving him face down on the ground. Police reports said that officers performed CPR on Scott, although the video indicates that no CPR was performed on the victim. [7] The video shows that Slager ran back toward where the initial scuffle occurred and picked something up off the ground. Moments later, he dropped the object which appears to be the Taser, beside Scott's body.[33][34]

Another officer, identified as Clarence W. Habersham Jr., is seen in the video; he puts on medical gloves and appears to examine Scott.[35]

Aftermath [edit]

There have been calls for the prosecution of Clarence Habersham, the second officer seen in the video, for an attempted cover-up with allegations that he made false statements and deliberately left facts out of his report in an attempt to protect Slager.[36] Habersham has also been criticized for stating that he attempted to render aid to the victim by applying pressure to the gunshot wounds despite when the video evidence contradicts this statement.[37]

Slager's original lawyer, David Aylor, withdrew as counsel within hours of the release of the video. When questioned in an interview, Aylor declined to give a reason for his withdrawal, citing attorney–client privilege.[38][39] David Aylor issued the following statement on his official website "Today, I withdrew my representation of Michael Slager. This is a terrible tragedy that has impacted our community."[40]

On April 8, the North Charleston city manager announced that the NCPD had fired Slager but would continue to pay for his health insurance because his wife was pregnant.[41] The town's mayor, Keith Summey, said they had ordered an additional 150 body cameras, enough that one could be worn by every police officer.[22]

A GoFundMe campaign was started to raise money for Slager's defense, but it was quickly shut down by the site. Citing privacy concerns, they declined to go into detail about why the campaign was canceled, saying only that it was "due to a violation of our terms and conditions".[42]

Scott's funeral took place on April 11, at the W.O.R.D. Ministries Christian Center in Summerville, about 20 miles from North Charleston.[2][43]

Scott's killing further fueled a national conversation around race and policing.[44] It has been connected to similar events in Missouri, New York, and elsewhere.[45] The Black Lives Matter movement protested Scott's death.[46]

A bill in the South Carolina state house designed to equip more police officers with body cameras, was renamed for Walter Scott. The Senate set aside US$3.4 million to fund it, enough to buy 2,000 cameras for South Carolina officers.[47]

Investigation [edit]

The use of deadly force by law enforcement in the United States is subject to the 1985 *Tennessee v. Garner* decision, which ruled that when a law enforcement officer is pursuing a fleeing suspect, he or she may not use deadly force to prevent escape unless "the officer has probable cause to believe that the suspect poses a significant threat of death or serious physical injury to the officer or others".[7][48]

Separate investigations are being conducted by the FBI, the U.S. Attorney in South Carolina, the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, and the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED).[29][49]

Murder charge [edit]

After the police department reviewed the video,[7] Slager was arrested on April 7 and charged with murder. He is being held without bail.[50]

On June 8, a South Carolina grand jury indicted Slager on the murder charge[1][note 2] after a few hours of deliberation. If convicted, he would face between 30 years and life in prison without the possibility of parole. No trial date was set.[33] The murder charge was the only charge presented to the grand jury.[51]

See also [edit]

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

Notes [edit]

1. ^ This is the name spelling used in the grand jury indictment document[1] as well as in many news sources. Many other news sources have spelled Scott's middle name as "Lamer".
2. ^ South Carolina law defines only one type of murder: "unlawful killing with malice aforethought".[33]

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External links [edit]

- *Video Shows Fatal Police Shooting*. *The New York Times*. April 7, 2015. Retrieved April 9, 2015. (with annotations and enhanced close up of a dropped object)
- *Walter Scott shooting footage synced with police scanner audio – video*. *The Guardian*. April 9, 2015. Retrieved April 9, 2015. (Entire video with annotations)

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