

7 Rochester Police Officers Suspended in Death of Black Man Whom They Hooded

The man, Daniel Prude, suffocated to death in March after he was detained by officers.



Daniel Prude died in March after an encounter with the police in Rochester, N.Y., but it was not until early September before the confrontation became public, arousing anger from his family and protesters.

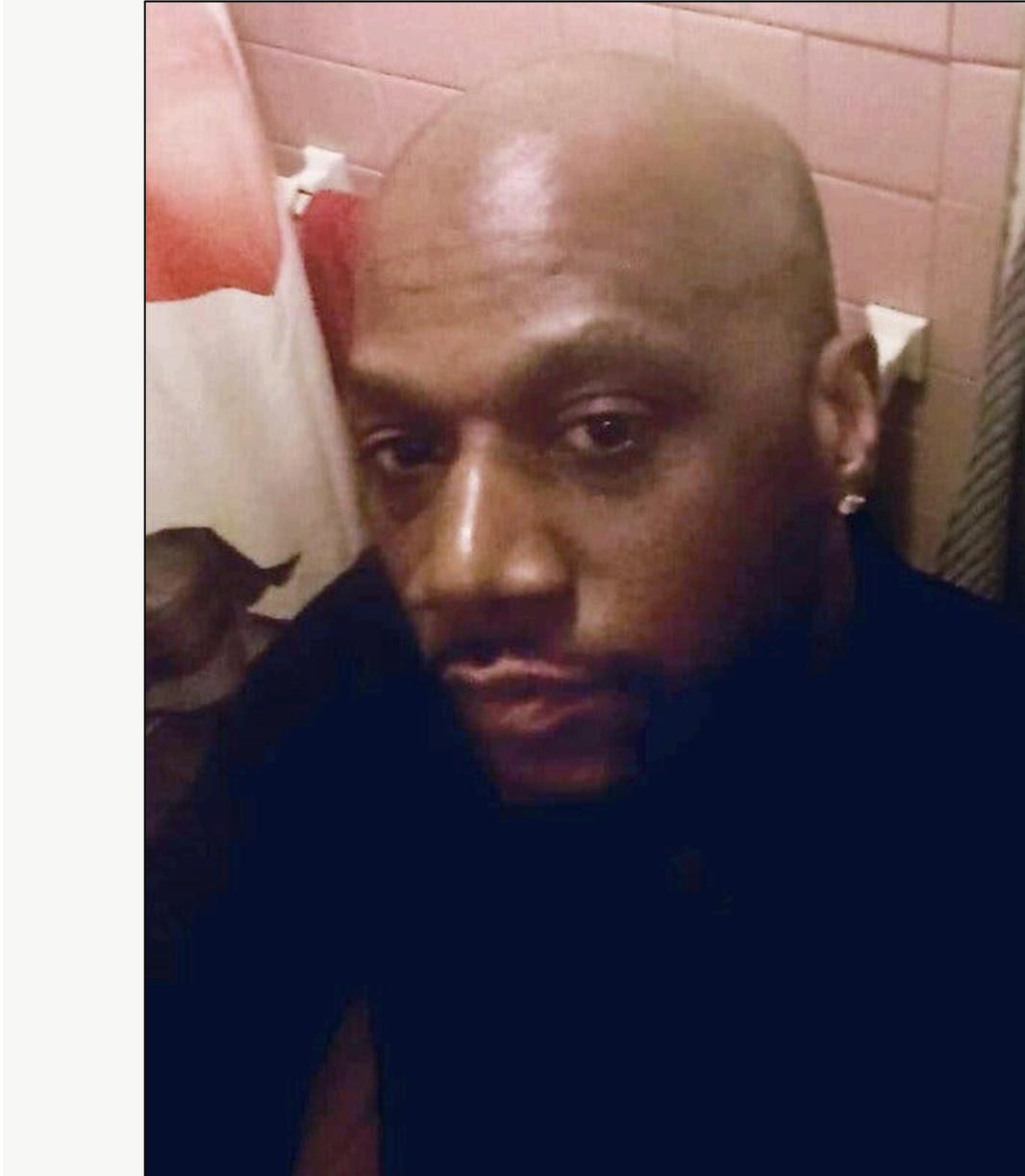
By Michael Wilson, Troy Closson, Jesse McKinley and Sarah Maslin Nir
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A light snow was falling on Rochester, N.Y., the streets empty and dark at 3 a.m., when the call came in over the police radio: A naked man was running outside, under the influence of PCP, and shouting that he had the coronavirus.

Rochester police officers arrived and handcuffed the man, Daniel Prude, 41. He sat in the road, rambling and incoherent, praising Jesus before demanding that the officers give him a gun, according to video footage of the March 23 encounter.

Then he began spitting on the ground. An officer unfurled a mesh hood — a safety device to prevent being spit on by prisoners — and pulled it over Mr. Prude's head.

When he tried to rise, officers forced Mr. Prude facedown on the ground, one of them holding his head to the pavement, according to video from the officer's body camera. Mr. Prude's demands that the hood be removed turned into gurgling noises as an ambulance arrived. Moments later, Mr. Prude stopped breathing. He was revived in the ambulance and hospitalized, but he never regained consciousness. Seven days later, he died.



Daniel Prude, 41, arrived in Rochester shortly before his encounter with the police, and quickly began acting erratically, his brother said.

Those two fatal minutes, brought to national attention on Wednesday with the release of the raw police videos by Mr. Prude's family, are the latest to roil yet another American city outraged by the death of a Black man in custody. Protesters took to the streets of Rochester, with Mr. Prude's relatives raising questions familiar from prior fatal encounters with the police, such as why the officers have not been suspended.

On Thursday, the mayor of Rochester, Lovely Warren, suspended seven officers involved in the confrontation.

The disciplinary action was the first taken in the five-plus months since Mr. Prude's death; on Wednesday, the state attorney general, Letitia James, made her first statement on the case, offering condolences to Mr. Prude's family and promising "a fair and independent investigation," which began not long after Mr. Prude's death. "We will work tirelessly to provide the transparency and accountability that all our communities deserve," she said.

In the wake of high-profile victims of fatal encounters with the police around the country, including George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and the shooting of Jacob Blake, the lag between the death of Mr. Prude and the acknowledgment of an investigation by Ms. James and Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo — both Democrats who have been outspoken on the issue of police brutality — was jarring.

On Wednesday evening, as outrage over the circumstances of Mr. Prude's death spread, Mr. Cuomo said he had not seen the body camera footage. By Thursday, however, the governor was calling "for answers," saying the video was "deeply disturbing," and urging a quickening of the investigation.

The Monroe County medical examiner ruled Mr. Prude's death a homicide caused by "complications of asphyxia in the setting of physical restraint," according to an autopsy report.

"Excited delirium" and acute intoxication by phencyclidine, or the drug PCP, were contributing factors, the report said.

Nonetheless, the stark scene — a Black man, handcuffed and sitting in a street, wearing nothing but a white hood — seemed a shocking combination of physical helplessness and racist imagery from another era.



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