

Police Told Family He Died In A Car Crash. Video Footage Showed He Died In Their Custody



Ronald Greene's family was told by police that he had died in a car chase after running into a tree.

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Police told the family of Ronald Greene that the 49-year-old Black man died after his car crashed into a tree during a police pursuit in May 2019, and in the two years that followed refused to publicly release body-camera footage of the incident.

Until this week, when the Associated Press published video that showed Louisiana state troopers had instead stunned, punched and dragged Greene as he apologized for leading them on a high-speed chase.

In the footage, white officers can be seen using a stun gun on Greene, who said: “I’m your brother! I’m scared! I’m scared!”

The deception that followed Greene’s death has underlined the power police have to shape the narrative around their encounters with the public and to mask brutality in their ranks.

Unlike other incidents where body-camera footage has been provided almost immediately after an encounter with police turns fatal, authorities refused to release footage from Greene’s arrest for two years.

Greene had ignored requests to pull over for an unspecified traffic violation just after midnight on 20 May 2019, prompting a car chase on the dark, rural roads near the border with Arkansas.

Greene's family said police first told them that Greene had died in the car chase, running into a tree and fatally injuring his head after hitting the windshield. Later, police adjusted the story and said Greene had struggled with troopers and died on the way to the hospital.

The Associated Press did not say how it obtained a 46-minute video clip from an officer's body camera, but made three clips from the video public on Wednesday that proved the narrative from Louisiana state police was largely fabricated.

"The cover-up started within hours after we got news of him being killed in this accident," Greene's mother, Mona Hardin, told CNN.

In the video, officers wrestle Green to the ground, put him in a chokehold and call him a "stupid motherfucker". After police put Greene's legs in shackles and cuff his hands, the AP said police drag him face down and leave him while cleaning blood off their hands and faces. That is not shown in the video the news agency released.

An attorney for Greene's family, Lee Merritt, told the AP the footage "has some of the same hallmarks of the George Floyd video, the length of it, the sheer brutality of it".

A crucial difference being that one video was suppressed, while Greene's family fought for answers largely out of the national spotlight, and the other video was released the day after George Floyd was killed – spurring worldwide protests against racial injustice.

Greene's family had already filed a wrongful death-lawsuit in the case, writing that excessive force left Greene "beaten, bloodied, and in cardiac arrest". They saw the video in October but officials refused to make it public.

Louisiana state police did not immediately respond to a request from the Guardian for comment. The agency told the AP the "premature public release of investigative files and video evidence in this case is not authorized and ... undermines the investigative process and compromises the fair and impartial outcome".

While the brutal reality of the incident has been made public, the cause of Greene's death is still unknown.

The Union parish coroner, Renee Smith, who was not in office when the determination about Greene was made, told the AP last year that his death was attributed to cardiac arrest and ruled accidental. She said the office's file did not mention his struggle with police.

Meanwhile, Merritt, the family's lawyer, tweeted on Friday that many of the officers involved with the attack on Greene were still working. A federal civil rights investigation is ongoing.

"Let's stop talking about the murder of Ronald Greene like some historic injustice we all can learn from," Merritt said. "Greene's family is not looking for the nation's sympathy – we want consequences. Immediately."