

Philando Castile, July 16, 1983 – July 6, 2016, 32 years old

Philando Divall Castile was born on July 16, 1983, in St. Louis, Missouri. When he was a toddler, his mother, Valerie Castile, moved with him to St. Paul, Minnesota, where he spent the majority of his life. Valerie said she moved to Minnesota to give her son a better life, and that he had thrived there.

Philando was an excellent student, and as a teenager he worked at Blockbuster and Target, as well as taking jobs fixing bicycles. After graduating with honors from St. Paul Central High School, he began working for the St. Paul Public School District in Nutrition Services. He was promoted to Nutrition Services Supervisor, managing the cafeteria at J. J. Hill Montessori Magnet School starting in 2014, where he knew the names of all 500 students he served every day, as well as their food allergies. The students all called him “Mr. Phil”, and other staff who worked at the school remember him for smiling at everyone and making the cafeteria a happy place. One parent remembered Philando as being “like Mr. Rogers”. His mother said, “He loved his job... He was an all-around good kid. He never got in trouble with me.”

An excerpt from the *Central Honors Philando Scholarship* website reads:

Philando was an ambitious man who served as a role model for hundreds of children... Outside of work, Philando enjoyed playing video games and spending time with his friends and family, with whom he was very close. He was known for his quiet and calm demeanor, big heart, and huge smile. His death has left a large hole in the community.

On July 6th, 2016, Philando spent the afternoon getting his hair done for his 33rd birthday, which was 10 days away. Afterwards, he visited his sister Allysza Castile, and ate dinner with her. A New York Times article explains:

Over a meal of Taco Bell takeout, the two siblings alternated between laughter and serious discussions, including about the fatal shooting of Alton Sterling by the police in Louisiana [the day before].

“We talked about all this stuff: ‘Did you see that video on Facebook of the man getting killed?’” Ms. Castile recalled in an interview Tuesday. “I said, ‘No, I didn’t watch it, bro. I refuse to watch another video.’”

After leaving his sister’s house, Philando picked up his fiancée, Diamond Reynolds, and her 4-year-old daughter, Dae’Anna, and went grocery shopping. While driving

home from the store around 9 p.m., Philando and his family were pulled over by police officer Jeronimo Yanez in the Falcon Heights suburb of St. Paul.

Yanez told Philando that he had pulled them over for a broken taillight, and asked for Philando's identification. However, in police audio released during the investigation, Yanez was recorded saying on the radio that he was going to stop the vehicle Philando was driving because "[t]he two occupants just look like people that were involved in a robbery... The driver looks more like one of our suspects, just because of the wide-set nose. I couldn't get a good look at the passenger." The Star Tribune continues:

It's unclear which robbery suspects police believed Castile and Reynolds resembled. However, one day earlier, the [Bureau of Criminal Apprehension] issued a call for the public's help in identifying two suspects in a July 2 armed robbery of a nearby Lauderdale convenience store. Both suspects in the July 2 robbery were described as black men with shoulder-length or longer dreadlocks. The descriptions of the suspects included the clothing each suspect wore, but did not include estimated height, weight or ages.

Albert Goins, an attorney who assisted the Castile family in the hours following the shooting, said that if Castile were indeed a robbery suspect, officers would have initiated a felony traffic stop, which ...involves bringing the suspect out at gunpoint while officers are in a position of cover and having them lie on the ground until they can identify who that individual is, he said.

With regard to the audio, Goins said, "I can't imagine that it's reasonable suspicion to make a stop because somebody had a broad nose."

Yanez and his partner, Joseph Kauser, likely also recognized there was insufficient suspicion to make such a stop, as they chose to treat the interaction as a "stop and ID" instead. Police stops for low level offences disproportionately affect Black people, and can trap low-income individuals in cycles of being fined and not able to pay the fine, then getting stopped more often due to being known to police. This increased attention from police can be deadly, with similar stops also leading to the deaths of Jermaine Carby, Eric Garner, Samuel DuBose, Sandra Bland, and many others.

Philando was first pulled over by police in 2002, and charged with violation of his learners permit. The violation was not specified, but his license was suspended. This process repeated as police stopped him more frequently, for instance, after being stopped on January 8, 2003 for a "reduced speed required" violation, he was also pulled over on February 3rd, 12th, 26th, and on March 4th. An NPR review of Philando's court records found that before he was stopped by Yanez on July 6th 2016, Philando had been stopped by police at least 46 times. Many of the resulting cases

were dismissed, and none of them were for violations more serious than a misdemeanor.

Dash-cam footage from the police car shows Yanez approached the driver's side, while Kauser stood on the passenger's side of the vehicle to watch Diamond. Yanez was heard telling Philando that his brake light was broken and asked for his license and registration. Philando's ID was in his wallet, which he needed to reach into his pocket to retrieve. Philando told Officer Yanez calmly, "Sir, I have to tell you I do have a firearm on me." Philando was licensed to carry a firearm, and likely informed Yanez to avoid misunderstanding if the gun was seen. Yanez then placed his hand on his own gun and shouted "Don't pull it out!", before firing seven shots into the car, two of which struck Philando. Philando's actions are not visible in the video but Diamond can be heard just beforehand, telling Yanez that Philando is not reaching for his gun, and Philando can be heard just afterward saying, "I wasn't reaching." Yanez is heard later saying to Kauser, "I don't know where the gun was."

The immediate aftermath of the shooting was live-streamed on Facebook by Diamond, showing Philando bleeding in the driver's seat while 4-year-old Dae'Anna can be heard crying in the back seat. In the video, Officer Yanez appears panicked, still pointing the gun into the car, as Diamond explains what just transpired. The Star Tribune reported:

The officer pointing the gun can be heard uttering expletives, then telling Reynolds to keep her hands where they were. Later, he can be heard saying "I told him not to reach for it."

Reynolds replies: "You told him to get his ID, sir, his driver's license. Oh my god, please don't tell me he's dead."

Reynolds recounts the scene over and over on the 10-minute video as she is handcuffed and placed in a squad car...

"Please don't tell me my boyfriend's gone" Reynolds pleads in the video. "He don't deserve this, please. ... He works for St. Paul Public Schools. ... He's never been in jail, anything. He's not a gang member, anything."

At one point in the video, Reynolds' daughter cries, "Mom, please stop cussing and screaming because I don't want you to get shot."

Instead of first checking Philando for signs of life, officers arriving in the minutes after the shooting comforted Yanez instead, said Diamond. “They instantly rushed their colleague off to the side where they comforted him. Where he began to mourn and cry, ‘Oh my god, I can’t believe this.’ ”

Diamond was taken to the police station in handcuffs, where her phone was confiscated and her questions were ignored, including about whether Philando was dead. She said that police treated her “like a criminal ...like it was my fault.”

Juan Toran, an officer responding to the shooting, said he was performing CPR on Philando when he saw the gun as paramedics rolled Philando onto a backboard, at which point he removed it. St. Paul paramedic Eric Torgerson testified that he didn't see the gun sliding out of Philando's pocket, but rather that he saw an officer reach deep into Philando's pocket to pull out the gun.

Philando was taken to Hennepin County Medical Center by ambulance, where he was pronounced dead a few minutes after arriving.

In interviews, Philando's mother, Valerie, said she had taught her son to “comply” in any police interaction, and attributed his death to being “black in the wrong place,” a victim of “a silent war against African-American people.” A People article read:

“Go to work and come home: that was his ritual” Valerie said. “He was no gangbanger. He wasn't a thug. He wasn't into criminal activity of course because he would not have had the job that he had. If he was a criminal, the state of Minnesota would not have given him a license to carry.”

As news of the shooting spread that night, around 200 protesters gathered near the site of the shooting, where authorities were still examining the car and surrounding area for evidence. By 2:15 a.m., many protesters, including Philando's fiancée Diamond Reynolds, Philando's uncle, Clarence Castile, and Minneapolis NAACP President Nekima Levy-Pounds, had gathered outside Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton's residence in St. Paul, chanting “No justice, no peace! Prosecute the police! Wake up!”

Gov. Dayton made a statement the following day:

“Would this have happened if those passengers, the driver and the passengers, were white? I don't think it would have. ...I think all of us in Minnesota are forced to confront that this kind of racism exists.

Nobody should be shot and killed in Minnesota ...for a tail light being out of function. Nobody should be shot and killed while seated still in their car. I'm heartbroken."

Peaceful protests and vigils continued in St. Paul for two days. On the evening of July 9th, a protest on Interstate 94 in St. Paul became confrontational as demonstrators threw rocks, broken bottles, and other objects at officers, which the police responded to with tear gas and over 100 arrests.

President Barack Obama made a statement following Philando Castile's and Alton Sterling's deaths at the hands of police officers:

"What's clear is that these fatal shootings are not isolated incidents... They are symptomatic of the broader challenges within our criminal justice system, the racial disparities that appear across the system year after year, and the resulting lack of trust that exists between law enforcement and too many of the communities they serve."

Both officers, Yanez and Kauser, were placed on paid administrative leave following the shooting. On June 16, 2017, Yanez was found not guilty of second-degree manslaughter, and was also acquitted of two counts of 'intentional discharge of a firearm that endangers safety'. The City of St. Paul announced the same day that Yanez would not return to their police force. An estimated 2000 protestors took to the streets that night to protest the acquittal, leading to the I-94 being shut down for about 3 hours, with police arresting 18 people, including multiple journalists.

In June 2017, Valerie Castile reached a settlement with the City of St. Anthony for \$3m. In November 2017, the St. Anthony City Council voted to pay Diamond Reynolds and her daughter \$675,000. Diamond would also receive \$125,000 from the City of Roseville, where she was detained by police and questioned after the shooting.

In August of 2017, a group of Philando's high school classmates organized a fundraiser to establish the *Central Honors Philando Castile Memorial Scholarship*, to be awarded annually to a St. Paul Central High School Senior.

In July 2021, 17-year-old activist Semhar Solomon created a mural of Philando that was displayed outside St. Anthony City Hall where the police department is located, before being gifted to the *Philando Castile Peace Garden*, a project still raising funds to build a community gathering space at the site of Philando's death. The giveMN.org fundraiser page reads:

The Community Peace Garden has been designed to feature and preserve art pieces created and placed there by community members in the wake of Philando Castile's tragic death, and to allow families and community members, law enforcement, and local, state, national and international leaders to join together in the search for peace and justice.

In loving memory of Philando Divall Castile.

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