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The Forgotten Families Of Memphis Police Violence Also Want Answers

Long before the death of Tyre Nichols, cops were killing Black people in Memphis — and their loved ones want justice, too.

By Phillip Jackson

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MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Nyliayh Stewart said she did everything with her cousin Darrius Stewart. They grew up together in the same house and went to the same schools starting in day care — the two even had the same second-grade teacher.

She remembered her cousin as “sweet and kind-hearted,” and she said all his friends would say the same thing about him.

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“Every memory would be my favorite memory,” she told HuffPost.

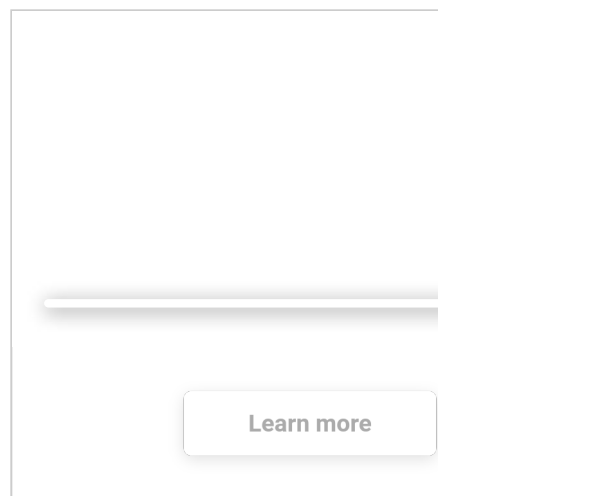
Nearly eight years ago, Darrius Stewart was in a car that was pulled over by a white Memphis police officer. He was sitting in the back passenger seat. The officer, Connor Schilling, asked for everyone’s identification in the vehicle and found two active warrants against Stewart.

Police placed the 19-year-old in the back of a patrol car but did not handcuff him.

Police accused him of kicking the patrol car door open and

shooting. Stewart was unarmed during the entire encounter.

Amy Weirich, who was Shelby County district attorney at the time, presented a manslaughter case against Schilling to a grand jury, but it declined to indict the officer. The United States Justice Department launched a [federal investigation](#) into the shooting but found “insufficient evidence” for civil rights violations. In 2016, Stewart’s family filed a wrongful death lawsuit against the City of Memphis and Schilling, but a judge [severed](#) the city from the suit due to a lack of evidence that city policies led to his death. In 2020, the family filed another \$17 million dollar lawsuit against Schilling alone, which remains ongoing.



The Stewart family, like others in Memphis, has been fighting for justice in cases of police violence for years – and the death of Tyre Nichols has energized their push for accountability. Among other things, they want Shelby County’s new district attorney, Steve Mulroy, to reexamine their loved ones’ cases.

‘This Has Been Happening’



families of Memphis police violence victims. Some gathered in the city on Saturday with other protesters, who blocked off streets near the downtown area.



John Perry was among them. Police shot and killed his son Jaylin McKenzie late last year. Perry told HuffPost he buried his son in Atlanta on Jan. 6 – one day before Nichols died.

The initial police report says officers responded to a “suspicious vehicle” in a parking lot but never specified the reason for stopping it, nor what officers found suspicious. Authorities claim the driver, a friend of McKenzie, attempted to flee from the officers but ended up crashing into a nearby pole. Four men, including McKenzie, then fled from the car.


“The suspect turned and fired at officers, and one officer returned fire, striking the subject,” the police account said. But the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, which is probing the shooting at Mulroy’s request, did not assert that McKenzie shot first when it released its initial account of what happened. “One officer and the subject exchanged gunfire, resulting in the death of the individual,” the bureau’s [statement](#) read.

understand what happened. He said he has also asked Memphis police why officers stopped his son but has not received an answer. He also does not know the name of the officer involved yet.

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“It was never a fair fight and it is still not a fair fight. With the cops, it is not a fair fight,” Perry told HuffPost.

Perry said his son was not from Memphis and lived in Georgia with his mother. The police called McKenzie’s mother telling her that her son was shot. Perry said he had just seen him earlier in the day.

He attended Saturday’s protest surrounded by his other sons as they held up a memorial poster for McKenzie in the street. It was one of several protests Perry has attended since the death of Nichols.

“Most of the time I wake up crying. I really don’t get any sleep because I don’t have any answers,” he said.

Janice Banks was also there. Her son, Martavious Banks, a Black man, was shot and critically injured by former police officer Jamarcus Jeames in 2018 after a traffic stop. Weirich, the former DA, never charged Jeames even after the department found he had violated body camera policies by not having his camera operating

but was released in August 2019. Following a civil lawsuit, his family was awarded \$200,000 after initially seeking \$10 million. Jeames resigned from the department after the shooting and the other officers involved were suspended with pay.

“When I saw that picture of Tyre Nichols in the hospital, I had flashbacks.”

– Janice Banks, mother of Martavious Banks

Janice Banks protested for nearly two weeks straight in South Memphis in 2018 near the area where her son was shot and along the strip of Elvis Presley Boulevard.

It has been nearly five years since the incident, and he still suffers from emotional trauma, she told HuffPost. She saw the picture of Nichols on his hospital bed, she remembered what police did to her son.

“When I saw that picture of Tyre Nichols in the hospital, I had

beaten, too. She told HuffPost he was kicked in the top of his head and his teeth were knocked out of his mouth.

“I don’t think that my son got justice. The officers involved in the shooting should have gotten jail time. Amy Weirich was the DA at the time of my son’s shooting and she did not bring any charges or justification for any officer involved,” she said.

“They should have put charges on him since he [Jeames] resigned. He got away scot-free, if you ask me. They are dirty, they are low-down and they commit serious crimes under these badges.”





after he was fatally shot by police in the city.

“If they would have focused on it then, then my cousin would not have been killed, and this boy [Tyre Nichols] wouldn’t have been killed. And it is now like with this case going worldwide, people want to look into Memphis, but this has been happening, people have been saying that this is happening,” Stewart told HuffPost.

Mulroy’s Justice Review Unit

entity that is independent from the police and reports directly to the district attorney's office.

The mission of the unit is to review and reexamine cases of police violence in Shelby County.

This unit was long overdue in the eyes of Janice Banks, Nyliayh Stewart and many other families who suffered from Memphis police violence — but it may not open up cases of past controversial police shootings.

“Our office has not determined if we will be looking into past cases of the charged officers,” Erica Williams, a spokesperson for the office, told HuffPost. “Our Justice Review Unit reviews officer-involved incidents that have occurred since the unit was formed last year.”

Nyliayh Stewart said she had reached out to Mulroy's office and that he had told her he had “a team” to look into her cousin's death, but there was no other follow-up. She believes all police shootings should be reinvestigated now that Nichols' case has been brought before the Department of Justice and has positioned Memphis in

them to do that, Nyllayn Stewart said.

“If you already had a team that was looking into this case, you didn’t think to reach out to my aunt or the family of Darrius Stewart and say, ‘I’m sorry this is going on, this is an ongoing problem and it did not start with Tyre.’”

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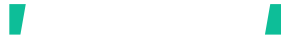
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