

Friend of Police-Shooting Victim Speaks

Collins, Sam P K . Washington Informer ; Washington, D.C. [Washington, D.C]21 June 2018: 9.

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FULL TEXT

In the 18 months leading up to his death, Robert Lawrence White struggled to overcome his father's passing, squabbles over a family home, and intense feelings of loneliness.

White, described as quick-witted and funny, often walked the streets of Silver Spring, Maryland, to escape the chaos that clouded his mind.

White's last stroll on June 11 ended in a confrontation with a Montgomery County police officer, during which he was shot and killed. More than a week after the incident, questions remain about what transpired that Monday afternoon.

Though representatives of the Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD) say White, 41, assaulted Officer Amand Badgujar, close friends, citing reports from witnesses, said they believe Badgujar provoked White.

"Anyone who's talked to Rob in the last couple of years would always say they've seen him walking around random places. It's like 'Where's Waldo?'" Marvin Whitfield, White's friend of 35 years, told The Washington Informer.

Whitfield said when he first heard about the shooting, he didn't know White was involved until the next day when their mutual friend sent a screenshot of the deceased's photo followed by "Say it isn't so!"

Police say Badgujar, a two-year veteran, engaged White on 2:15 p.m. as part of an investigation into suspicious activity on the 9200 block of Three Oaks Drive in Silver Spring. In response to what was described as White's combative disposition, the officer pepper-sprayed White who then ran toward Badgujar and knocked him down. Bodycam footage, MCPD said, shows White assaulting Badgujar and Badgujar shooting White. The latter received treatment on the scene before being pronounced dead at a local hospital.

As the investigation of the shooting, coordinated by MCPD and the Howard County State Attorney's Office, gets underway, Whitfield and others say they want the release of video that shows the entirety of the deadly quarrel.

"Something has been lost in our society when we look at people, see exactly what they're going through, and instead of getting to the root of the matter, we label them as crazy, confused, or mentally ill," said Whitfield, 40, an Adelphi, Maryland, resident. "Rob liked walking and it was because of his loneliness. When you get to a point where you got a house you don't want to live in, that should be explored."

White's death prompted a candlelight vigil and calls for public officials to address police-community relations.

While he didn't form any conclusions about MCPD's involvement, Montgomery County Councilman Craig Rice (D-District 2) said in a carefully worded Facebook post Thursday he has questions about attempted de-escalation and proper use of force.

Last week, dozens of activists and community organizers converged on downtown Silver Spring to protest the shooting and demand the release of the bodycam footage.

Supporters of Brandy Brooks, an at-large candidate for the county council, was among the members of the crowd in downtown Silver Spring's spacious Veterans Plaza along Ellsworth Drive. She, too, expressed her concern about protocol around how police officers engage suspects enduring trauma, and equitable access to mental health services.

"We have so much work to do when it comes to police-community relations, especially for communities of color, immigrant communities, and residents with disabilities or with mental health needs," Brooks, a Democrat, told The Informer in a written statement.

For the full version of the story, go to washingtoninformer.com.

DETAILS

Subject:	Shootings; Community relations; Assaults; Mental health care
Location:	Maryland
People:	Rice, Craig
Company / organization:	Name: Washington Informer; NAICS: 511110; Name: Facebook Inc; NAICS: 518210, 519130
Ethnicity:	African American/Caribbean/African
Publication title:	Washington Informer; Washington, D.C.
Volume:	53
Issue:	36
Pages:	9
Publication year:	2018
Publication date:	Jun 21-Jun 27, 2018
Section:	AROUND THE REGION
Publisher:	Washington Informer
Place of publication:	Washington, D.C.
Country of publication:	United States, Washington, D.C.
Publication subject:	African American/Caribbean/African, Ethnic Interests, General Interest Periodicals-- United States
ISSN:	07419414
Source type:	Newspapers
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	News
ProQuest document ID:	2062669393
Document URL:	https://search.proquest.com/docview/2062669393?accountid=14026

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Last updated:	2018-07-02
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Database:	Ethnic NewsWatch,Global Newsstream
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