

Protesters march after death of Alabama man who wasn't mall shooter

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FULL TEXT

HOOVER, Ala. —Protesters on Saturday marched through an Alabama shopping mall where police killed a black man they later acknowledged was not the triggerman in a Thanksgiving night shooting that wounded two people. An officer shot and killed 21-year-old Emantic Fitzgerald Bradford, Jr. of Hueytown while responding to the Thursday mall shooting. Police said Bradford was fleeing the scene with a handgun.

Hoover police initially told reporters Bradford had shot a teen at the mall, but later retracted the statement. "We knew that was false," said stepmother Cynthia Bradford when she heard police were blaming him for the shooting. She described her stepson, who went by E.J., as a respectful young man whose father worked at a jail for the Birmingham Police Department.

Hoover Police Captain Gregg Rector said investigators now believe that more than two people were involved in the initial fight ahead of the shooting, and that "at least one gunman" is still at large who could be responsible. Police said while Bradford "may have been involved in some aspect of the altercation, he likely did not fire the rounds that injured the 18-year-old victim." Rector said police regret that their initial statement about Bradford was not accurate.

The shooting remains under investigation, including whether Bradford played any role in the initial disturbance, The unanswered questions stirred emotions in the suburb outside the majority-black city of Birmingham. More than 200 demonstrators, including several relatives, chanted "E.J" and "no justice, no peace" as they marched past Christmas shoppers at the mall. They held a moment of silence at the spot outside a shoe store where Bradford was killed.

Family members described their horror of finding out from social media that Bradford was dead. Video circulated on social media of Bradford lying in a pool of blood on the mall floor.

Speaking to The Associated Press on Saturday night from his family's home, Bradford's father Emantic Bradford Sr. called his son, "a good kid, a very good kid."

Bradford Sr. said his son had a permit to carry a weapon for self-defense. He said he doesn't know exactly what happened at the mall, but said it was hurtful that police portrayed his son as the shooter.

"They were so quick to rush to judgment. ... I knew my son didn't do that. People rushed to judgment. They shouldn't have done that," Bradford Sr. said.

Family members said they plan to ask to see body camera footage from officers. Hoover police have not confirmed to the AP whether such footage exists.

Carlos Chaverst, an activist in Birmingham who organized the protest, said that when authorities acknowledged that the person killed was not the actual shooter, "that sent us in an uproar." More protests will be held in the future to hold officials accountable, he added.

"When we found out about this incident, there were questions from the jump. People were upset because a man was shot and killed by police in our own backyard," he said.

The incident began Thanksgiving night with a fight and shooting in suburban Birmingham at the Riverchase Galleria, a mall crowded with Black Friday bargain hunters. An 18-year-old man was shot twice and a 12-year-old bystander was shot in the back. Hoover police said Friday morning that the girl was in stable condition.

The Alabama Law Enforcement Agency is investigating the incident since it is an officer-involved shooting. The Hoover Police Department is conducting its own internal investigation.

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