

Jemel Roberson: Family demands police release name of cop who shot black security guard

Madhani, Aamer . USA Today (Online) ; Arlington [Arlington]17 Nov 2018.

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ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)

An attorney for the partner of the black security guard shot to death by a suburban Chicago police officer called on investigators to release the officer's name.

FULL TEXT

MIDLOTHIAN, Ill. —An attorney for the partner of the black security guard who was shot to death by a suburban Chicago police officer this week called on investigators Friday to release the officer's name —or he'll do it himself. Jemel Roberson, 26, was working security at a bar in Robbins, Illinois, early Sunday when a gunman opened fire inside the bar.

Roberson was armed and licensed to carry a gun. He apprehended the gunman outside the bar, pinned him down and was waiting for police help when a responding officer from the neighboring town of Midlothian arrived.

Police say the officer ordered Roberson to drop his gun. Witnesses say they shouted that Roberson was a security guard. The officer shot and killed Roberson.

Civil rights attorney Lee Merritt, who is representing the mother of Roberson's 9-month-old son, accused Illinois State Police and the Midlothian Police Department of withholding the name of the officer to give him time to clean up his internet footprint and "hide evidence. "

Merritt also represents the family of Botham Jean, the Dallas man who was shot to death in his home in September by an off-duty police officer.

Dallas Police Officer Amber Guyger has said she mistakenly entered the man's apartment in the same complex where she lived. She has said she thought she was in her apartment, and Jean was an intruder.

Dallas Police kept Guyger's name out of the public until she was arrested and charged with manslaughter, about 48 hours after the incident.

"They refused to release Amber Guyger's name, which gave her a chance to scrub the internet and hide evidence," Merritt told USA TODAY on Friday. "It's exactly what's going on here. "

Merritt said he's learned the name of the Midlothian officer independently and plans to release it to the media on Monday if authorities haven't by then.

Illinois State Police, which is investigating the shooting, referred questions on the officer's identity to Midlothian Police. Officials in Midlothian did not respond to requests for comment.

Midlothian Police have confirmed that the officer is white, has been a police officer for about seven years, including four years with Midlothian, and is a team leader on a SWAT task force that includes officers from south suburban Chicago law enforcement agencies.

More: Police: Cop who shot security guard Jemel Roberson gave 'multiple' commands to drop weapon before firing

More: Police officer near Chicago fatally shot security guard who was detaining a suspect

The shooting outside Manny's Blue Room Lounge in Robbins has drawn national headlines, outrage and questions about whether race factored into the officer's decision to open fire. Roberson was black. The officer is white.

The person Roberson apprehended had allegedly fired a weapon inside the bar moments earlier, wounding multiple people and drawing police from surrounding jurisdictions to rush to the establishment.

The Cook County Sheriff's Office is investigating the shooting inside the bar. The state police Public Integrity Task Force is investigating the shooting outside the bar. No charges have been filed in either incident.

The task force has said the Midlothian officer was responding to reports of a shooting when he saw a man decked out in "plain black clothing with no markings readily identifying him as a security guard, armed with a gun."

"According to witness statements, the Midlothian Officer gave the armed subject multiple verbal commands to drop the gun and get on the ground before ultimately discharging his weapon and striking the subject," state police said.

Midlothian's Police chief has praised Roberson as a brave man who was doing his job. He said he saw the incident ultimately as a "blue on blue," friendly fire shooting.

Merritt accused Illinois State Police and Midlothian Police of releasing a slow drip of information "designed to exonerate this officer ...and throw water on the community unrest."

Merritt said witnesses have told him that Roberson was wearing a beanie-styled hat emblazoned with the word "SECURITY," and a shirt and vest with similar markings.

The attorney said witnesses –some of whom he said were not interviewed by police –told him the officer did not give Roberson an opportunity to comply with his order to drop the gun.

"They're (police) saying 'We told him drop the gun and he didn't, that there was time to reflect,' "Merritt said. "The people we've interviewed are saying 'It was drop the gun –Pop! Pop! Pop!'"

Roberson suffered multiple gunshot wounds, according to the Cook County Medical Examiner's Officer.

Roberson's mother, Beatrice Roberson, has filed a federal civil lawsuit against Midlothian and the officer. Her attorney, Gregory Kulis, issued a subpoena Friday calling on Illinois State Police to release the name of the officer, according to a court filing.

Several Chicago area pastors and civil rights activist joined Merritt's call to release the officer's name. The Rev. Michael Pfleger, a prominent Catholic pastor and civil rights activist, said Midlothian should immediately fire the officer and the Cook County State's Attorney's Office should file murder charges.

Authorities say that officers from several jurisdictions were at the scene. The Midlothian officer is the only one who discharged his weapon.

"It was not a blue on blue," Pfleger said. "It was blue-on-black crime. This was no accidental murder. This was racial profiling."

LeAundre Hill, pastor at Chicago's Purposed Church, said Roberson worked as an organist and musician at several Chicago-area churches and recently helped with the music at the funeral service for one of Hill's relatives.

Roberson had a 9-month-old son with Avontae Boose. She is pregnant with their second child.

He planned to apply to become a police officer in the Chicago area.

Roberson had been hustling to pick up work wherever he could find it, Merritt said, so he'd have money to buy plenty of gifts for his son's first Christmas. He had a paid gig to play organ at a Chicago church on the morning he was killed.

Boose had been nervous about being pregnant again, Merritt said, but Roberson had assured her they'd be fine.

"The idea to being pregnant again that soon after having her first child was kind of kind of scary," Merritt said. "He was able to calm her down. He said, 'I'm going to become a police officer. I am going to be able to provide for you and this family.'"

DETAILS

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