

Seat belt violation results in 96 shots

Black man's death during encounter with Chicago officers raises questions

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CHICAGO – For Sheila Banks, the late afternoon of March 21 began easy, with her son Dexter Reed heading out to enjoy his new SUV.

“Momma, I’m going out for a ride,” she recalled Tuesday.

It ended with Reed, 26, gunned down on a residential corner by Chicago police officers who fired nearly 100 rounds in less than a minute, according to the Civilian Office of Police Accountability, the city’s police watchdog agency.

Police said they pulled Reed over for not wearing a seat belt – a contention that the accountability office questions amid rising tension over the killing and officers’ use of deadly force.

Releasing footage of the shooting Tuesday, the police accountability board said Reed “appears” to have fired first. But attorneys for the family called for a deeper investigation. They say the traffic stop was unconstitutional. Last but certainly not least, they alleged Tuesday that Reed was killed while unarmed and trying to surrender.

“If you watch the end of the video, you see an officer, military-style, executing Dexter while he laid by his vehicle, unarmed and helpless,” said Andrew M. Stroth, a local civil rights attorney representing Reed’s family.

City officials, from Mayor Brandon Johnson to State’s Attorney Kim Foxx, lamented Reed’s death, but have not said it warrants charges against the officers.

The shooting is the latest in a city that has a long history of controversy around police killings of men of color.

96 shots in 41 seconds

The shooting happened after five plainclothes officers in an unmarked car pulled Reed over at a residential corner on Chicago’s West Side.

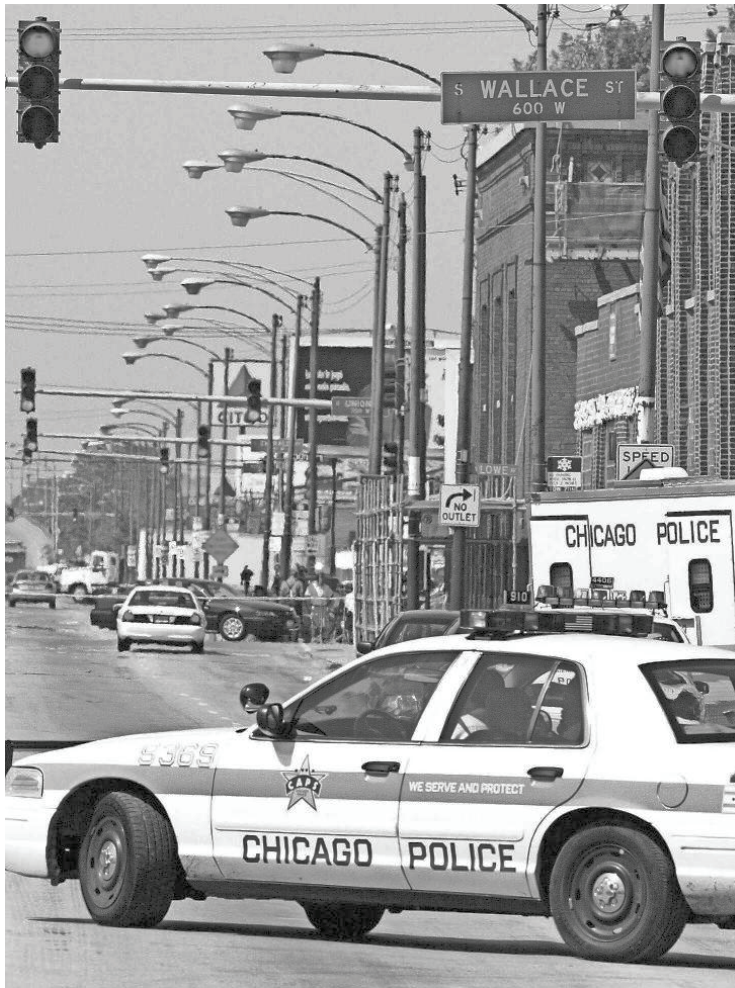
In the newly released body camera footage, an officer tells Reed to roll down the window. He does so. A black ski mask obscures much of his expression, but his eyes appear wide.

But Reed resists rolling down other windows, unlocking his doors, and the situation escalates.

Reed began firing, officials said, hitting one of the officers, although it’s unclear from the bodycam footage who fired first.

Officers fired on Reed 96 times in 41 seconds, according to the accountability board. It’s unclear if the 26-year-old’s hands were raised.

Bodycam footage shows one officer emptying his pistol multiple times, even after Reed went down and lay motion-



Chicago city officials, from Mayor Brandon Johnson to State’s Attorney Kim Foxx, have lamented Dexter Reed’s death, but have not said it warrants charges against the officers. TIM BOYLE/GETTY IMAGES FILE

less. An officer can be heard calling out that Reed’s gun is still in the car.

Reed was awaiting trial in a gun case, according to Cook County court records.

An officer hit in the arm in the shootout was in good condition, officials said.

‘Grave concerns’ from watchdog

In a letter last week, Andrea Kersten, head of the accountability board, questioned the truthfulness of the officers who fired on Reed and the appropriateness of their response. She recommended that the officers be stripped of their police powers while the board investigates.

The board is “uncertain” how the officers could have seen the undone seat belt, given the tinted windows of Reed’s car and its position, Kersten wrote to Chicago’s top cop in a letter USA TODAY obtained via a freedom of information request.

The officers’ response to Reed’s re-

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ported gunshots also raises “serious questions about the proportionality of their use of deadly force,” she said. “The evidence recovered ... indicates that all four officers discharged their firearms at [Reed] after he exited his vehicle and was unarmed.”

In particular, she calls out one officer for firing at least 50 times, including as Reed “lay motionless.”

Kersten wrote that the board “has grave concerns about the officers’ ability to assess what is a necessary, reasonable, and proportional use of deadly force.”

‘Pretextual, unconstitutional and unreasonable’

At a news conference Tuesday, Stroth and other attorneys decried the shooting as a clear “disproportionate use of force.”

Reed had a gun, they confirmed, but an investigation would be needed to confirm that he fired first. The lawyers stressed the encounter began with a “pretextual, unconstitutional and unreasonable” search that they called the latest example of the city’s failure to comply with a 2019 federal order to reform its policing.

“How many more Black and Brown men are going to die before this city will change?” Stroth said.

Banks, Reed’s mother, also spoke, saying, “I’m hurt, I’m sick, I feel like I’ve been shot up, I’m burning up inside.”

Reed, an athlete who loved basketball, was the one who checked in on her, she said, making sure she was eating well and exercising.

The 2019 police reform decree

Chicago’s legacy of interactions between police and civilians is historically so bad that in 2019, a federal judge ordered that the city reform its policing following the 2014 murder of Laquan McDonald.

The decree specifically called out the Chicago Police Department’s use of “tactical units,” said Sheila Bedi, another attorney for Reed’s family. Federal investigators referred to the plainclothes teams in unmarked cars as being “on the hunt,” she said.

The decree tried to eliminate “pretextual” traffic stops. “They don’t care about the seat belt,” the Northwestern Law School professor said. “They really want an excuse to search the car and come up with something else.”

Yet these “aggressive practices” are still in use, Bedi said. They’re exactly what the federal order was meant to address, “and clearly that failed.”

Mayor: ‘Deeply disturbing’

At a separate news conference Tuesday, the mayor offered his condolences to the family and called the footage “deeply disturbing.”

“I am devastated to see yet another young Black man lose his life during an interaction with police,” Johnson said.

Both Reed and the officer shot, who is also Black, “could have been my students,” he said.

Johnson said the quick release of the videos, which comes ahead of a 60-day mandate, shows his administration’s commitment to transparency.

The officers involved in the shooting will be placed on 30-day administrative leave, he said.

Foxx said her office is “investigating to determine if criminal charges are warranted.”