

March 15th, 2021

Breonna Taylor: The Institute's Reflections One Year Later

This Saturday, March 13th, marked one year since Breonna Taylor was fatally shot in her home. Breonna Taylor was a 26-year-old Black woman who worked as an emergency room technician and was also a certified emergency medical technician.

In what was later called a "botched raid," three white police officers broke down Breonna's front door after midnight, while Breonna was asleep in bed with her boyfriend, Kenneth Walker. Breonna and Kenneth were unaware that the three men were police officers. When he later called 911, Kenneth told the operator: "Somebody kicked in the door and shot my girlfriend."

In response to the police breaking down Breonna's door, Kenneth fired one warning shot with a legally licensed handgun. The officers fired 32 shots in return, wounding Kenneth and killing Breonna. The 32 shots fired by police officers included 10 shots fired "blindly" through Breonna's apartment by Detective Brett Hankison. Hankison was fired by the Louisville Metro Police Department (LMPD) in June 2020, and in September 2020, he was charged with three counts of wanton endangerment — specifically for endangering Breonna's neighbors, not for killing her. In fact, no officer has been charged with Breonna's murder.

Hankison was released on bail and his trial is set to begin August 31, 2021. Another officer involved, Detective Myles Cosgrove, who fired 16 shots into Breonna's apartment, was fired from the LMPD in January 2021. The third officer, Jonathan Mattingly, remains employed by the LMPD as a sergeant.

We commemorate Breonna's death because her tragedy is a stark reminder of the injustices regularly perpetrated against Black and Brown people in this country, as well as, of the considerable work required to correct these injustices. To quote the African American Policy Forum:

"Firing the officers who murdered Breonna Taylor is not justice. Arresting the officers who murdered Breonna Taylor is not justice... Justice is when Black women can sleep in their own homes without fear of being murdered by the police."