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2-13-2019

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## Repository Citation

Wilkes, Donald E. Jr., "The Persistence of Fatal Police Taserings in 2018" (2019). *Popular Media*. 302.  
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# The Persistence of Fatal Police Taserings in 2018

Flagpole February 13, 2019

By [Donald E. Wilkes, Jr.](#)

“Chinedu Okobi should be alive right now. At the very most, he should be in a hospital receiving mental health treatment. By now, he likely would’ve been released back to the care of his family... Chinedu lived with mental illness. He received treatment, took medications, and worked hard to balance his life the best he could... What I do know is that in this country, when someone is having a mental health crisis, police are called—which is like bringing in a bulldozer to fix a leaky faucet. It’s a stupid system... Chinedu needed to go to the hospital. He needed medical treatment. Instead, he was surrounded by officers who appear to have repeatedly used a Taser on him until he died.”—Shaun King, a friend of Chinedu Okobi, a 36-year old man fatally tasered by California police on Oct. 3, 2018.

“One of the concerns with these weapons [tasers] is that they’re not, in fact, non-lethal. They can be lethal. And because many law enforcement officers have been trained and believe that they are simply non-lethal alternatives, it leads to overuse. And with overuse, we see more lethal incidents, as well as non-lethal incidents that still result in serious consequences.”—Michaela Davis, staff attorney, American Civil Liberties Union, Oct. 31, 2018

## Tasers: Dangerous and Deadly Weapons

Many Americans are unaware of the significant perils to human life and health posed by taser electroshock weapons. Nor are they aware of the evil consequences flowing from widespread use of these sinister contraptions by police forces across the country. This ignorance is due in large part to the extensive misinformation about tasers foisted upon the public. The entry for “tasers” in Wikipedia, for example, reads more like a public relations release from those who market these weapons than an objective encyclopedia article.

Tasers are dangerous electroshock weapons. Their whole purpose is to stun and incapacitate human beings by inflicting jolting, painful, debilitating electrical shocks. The standard way of deploying a taser electroshock weapon is via its dart mode. In the dart mode, the weapon is pointed at the victim and then, propelled by compressed nitrogen cartridges, two barbed dart electrodes connected to the taser by thin conductive wire are fired at the victim with enough force to penetrate two inches of clothing. Once the barbed darts penetrate or become lodged in the flesh of the victim, the person deploying the taser may, by pulling its trigger, administer a series of excruciating, paralyzing, life-threatening electrical shocks on the victim.

Tasers used to be marketed as nonlethal weapons. Tasers, it was claimed, are not deadly weapons. Today, however, those who advocate police use of tasers have abandoned their

previous position that tasers are nonlethal. Nowadays tasers are marketed not as nonlethal weapons but instead as “less-lethal” weapons.

The word “less-lethal” is a recently coined, weasel-word adjective evidently designed to attempt to conceal the reality that taser electroshock weapons are deadly weapons. When used in reference to tasers, the term “less-lethal” abandons any pretense that tasers are nonlethal weapons, while simultaneously implying that tasers are not deadly weapons, either. Under this newly invented term, tasers are presented as neither deadly weapons nor nonlethal weapons. The term less-lethal, therefore, suggests that tasers constitute an entirely new category of weapons—weapons that are neither deadly nor nonlethal but somewhere in between.

But all weapons are either deadly weapons or nonlethal weapons. There is no third category of weapons. There is no such thing as a weapon that is neither deadly nor nonlethal. Tasers may be less lethal than some other deadly weapons, e.g., firearms, but nonetheless they are deadly weapons. Less-lethal weapons are lethal weapons, and lethal weapons are deadly weapons. No freshly devised, clever semantics ploys can change his stark fact.

### **The Persistence of Fatal Police Taserings in the United States**

A fatal police taserings occurs when a person dies suddenly, unexpectedly or suspiciously after being electroshocked one or more times with a taser by a police officer, a deputy sheriff, or a jailor or prison guard.

The persistence of fatal police taserings in the United States is irrefutable proof that tasers are deadly weapons.

Fatal police taserings have been a persistent phenomenon in the United States for nearly two decades. Steadily, relentlessly, year after year, month after month, our police kill citizens with tasers.

Dozens of Americans die every year after they are electroshocked by police deploying tasers. Statistics prove it. Here are the statistics on the number of fatal police taserings occurring in the United States each year since 2004:

#### **Year/Fatal Police Taserings**

2004 48

2005 66

2006 73

2007 67

2008 62  
2009 57  
2010 64  
2011 64  
2012 51  
2013 59  
2014 47  
2015 63  
2016 45  
2017 44  
2018 48

In the last 15 years, therefore, there have been an astonishing 858 fatal police taserings.

The total number of all fatal police taserings in the United States also is astonishing. The results of the most comprehensive investigation of fatal police taserings ever undertaken are set out in a Reuters report, “Deaths Involving Tasers,” released in 2017. That report concludes there have been more than 1,000 fatal taserings by American police.

That’s right. Over one thousand Americans are dead because they were electroshocked by police using tasers.

(Unfortunately, there are no statistics on the immense number of nonfatal police taserings—not even those that send the victim into a near-death coma or that result in paralysis or permanent or painful physical injuries.)

### **The 48 Fatal Police Taserings in the United States in 2018**

The names of the 48 victims fatally tasered by police in 2018, together with the date when and the place where each victim was electroshocked, is set out in the List of the Dead at the end of this article.

In 2018, an average of four Americans per month were fatally tasered by the police. Not a single month went by without at least two fatal police taserings. The largest number of police taserings fatalities in a calendar month was six. This happened in February and again in August. Twice there were two fatal police taserings on one day: on Dec. 5, when there

was one in California and another one in Texas, and on Dec. 27, when there was one in Massachusetts and one in Tennessee. Twice in 2018—on May 21-22 and Oct. 3-4—there were fatal police taserings on two consecutive days.

All the 2018 victims were male. Three of the victims were prisoners in jail.

In 2018, there was at least one fatal police tasering in 23 states—Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Washington.

There was more than one fatal police tasering in 10 of these 23 states. There were 14 fatal police taserings in California; four in Florida; three in Texas; and two each in seven states: Colorado, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Tennessee.

The statistics on fatal police taserings in California are disturbing. There were five of them in 2017 and 14 in 2018; thus, the number of fatal police taserings in California nearly tripled in one year. Thirty percent of all the fatal police taserings in the United States in 2018 took place in that one state. (Three—more than 20 percent—of the fatal police taserings in California in 2018 occurred in one county, San Mateo, whose population is less than 750,000 in a state with around 40 million inhabitants.)

At least 18 of the 48 victims of fatal police taserings in 2018—almost 40 percent—were electroshocked more than once. Nine of the 18 victims were shocked twice; two were shocked three times; one was shocked six times; one was shocked an unbelievable 27 times; and five victims were shocked an unspecified “multiple” number of times.

Three of the 2018 victims were electroshocked while naked.

Typically, victims fatally tasered by police die within hours of being electroshocked. In 2018, somewhat unusually, almost 25 percent—11 of the 48 shocked victims—died the next day or later. Three of these 11 victims survived for three days; one victim survived for five days; another victim for six days; and another for eight days. Paul Silva, tasered by California police, lingered for 36 days before dying.

Usually, the sequence of events in a fatal police tasering is this: The electroshocked victim experiences unbearable pain, collapses to the ground and convulses; suffers cardiac arrest or has a heart attack; struggles agonizingly to breathe; turns blue; and dies either shortly or within hours. In 2018, two of the fatal police taserings did not fall within this typical pattern of tasering fatalities. Christopher A. Roberts was walking or running down concrete stairs when he was tasered, whereupon he fell and hit his head. He died the next day, presumably of skull injuries. Dana Dean Carrothers was a suicidal man police found sitting in his van with a container of gasoline. As he attempted to re-enter the gasoline-soaked vehicle, a police officer “deployed his Taser.” Carrothers immediately burst into flames and “was burned beyond recognition.”

## **The Fatal Police Taserings in Georgia in 2018**

There were two fatal police taserings in Georgia in 2018.

This brings the total number of fatal police taserings in this state to 31.

The first fatal police taser in Georgia in 2018 occurred on Jan. 27 in Barrow County. The victim was 30-year old Charles Williams.

The GBI, which was investigating the circumstances of Williams' death, refused to comment. It did issue a two- sentence statement: "A Taser was deployed by one of the deputies to gain control of Williams. He continued to be combative and fought with deputies after the Taser was used."

After watching a video of her son being subdued by four deputies, Williams' mother told the press: "The only thing running through my mind is they're hiding things. I want justice for my son. I do think there was excessive force used on him. How are you going to tell him to 'calm down' if you're punching him and hitting him with a Taser?"

The second 2018 fatal police taser in Georgia occurred in Fulton County on Sept. 11. The victim was 32-year old Antonio May, an inmate of the Fulton County Jail imprisoned on trespassing charges.

According to the jail officials, May "was allegedly combative and failed to comply with jail staff, causing a confrontation." Jail staff then "used a stun gun on May and pepper-sprayed him... He later became unresponsive." Subsequent news stories report that May "was shot by two Tasers... [and later] he became unresponsive, fell to the floor and died."

According to other news reports, at least one jail inmate provided an account of the Antonio May taser incident that differed markedly from the version given by jailors. Members of May's family called his death "plain murder," picketed the jail and asked for a criminal investigation.

An attorney for May's family describes his fatal taser in the Fulton County Jail as part of the "culture of death" at that facility. Atlanta newspapers report that the Fulton County Jail ranks No. 1 in the state for inmate deaths. There have been more than 50 inmate deaths at the Fulton County Jail over the past decade, and in 2017, five inmates died there within a 75-day period.

### **Fatal Police Taserings: Concluding Comments**

Understanding the severity of the problem of fatal police taserings in the United States requires more than familiarity with statistical information. It requires more than number-crunching. It means never forgetting the fundamental values of Western civilization. We must always keep considerations of our common humanity and respect for human rights in mind. The following comments are therefore appropriate.

First, videos of fatal police taserings increasingly reveal scenes of extreme police violence you would expect to see only in some dreadful dystopian police state. You see four or more burly uniformed police officers, armed to the teeth and accoutered like military commandos, who have surrounded and are swarming over an unarmed citizen who lies on the ground writhing and screaming in pain as he is electroshocked and pummeled and pinioned. These terrifying recurring scenarios should never, never happen in the United States of America.

Second, police agencies responsible for fatally tasing a citizen frequently refuse to talk to the press and instead issue carefully worded exculpatory statements that purport to justify whatever they say the officers did or did not do and that squarely place blame for the death on the deceased victim, who cannot speak.

All over the country, police accounts of fatal taserings are suspiciously similar. The accounts appear scripted, contain boilerplate phraseology, and are laced with Orwellian euphemisms. These accounts describe the police activities in the passive tense (e.g., “a taser was deployed”). The victim was “combative.” After the tasing, the victim became “unresponsive” or exhibited “medical distress.” The weapon used against the victim (who is dehumanized by being called “the suspect” or “the subject”) was “a department-issued conducted energy device,” “an electronic control device,” or “a stun gun.”

Third, many, perhaps a majority, of the fatally tasered victims appear to be people from the margins of society in need of assistance, not lethal police violence. They are homeless. They are in poor health. They are obese. They have diabetes. They suffer from mental health issues and drug addiction. They have a history of mental illness. They suffer from schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, or are discharged military veterans with PTSD. With horrible irony, a number of these hapless victims die because a family member calls 911 for assistance, whereupon responding police officers proceed to electroshock the person in need of help.

There are YouTube videos of several of the fatal police taserings in 2018. Watching them is not for the squeamish. If you are strong enough to watch images of police officers killing citizens by electrically shocking them to death, here are links to two of the videos. Click [here](#) for the fatal tasing of victim Luis Alberto Luna, and click [here](#) (age-restricted video) for the fatal tasing of victim Joshua Harvey.

## **A LIST OF THE DEAD**

The 48 Victims of Fatal Police Taserings in 2018

Jan. 1, Deautry Charles Ross, 34, Torrance, CA

Jan. 16, Warren Ragudo, 34, Daly City, San Mateo County, CA (died 1/17/18)

Jan. 22, John Havener Jr., 41, Oneida, NY

Jan. 24, Christopher McKinney, 39, Gadsen, AL

Jan. 27, Charles Williams, 30, Barrow County, GA

Feb. 3, Jeremy Spencer, 48, Lake Los Angeles, CA

Feb. 10, Aaron M. Parker, 20, Tallahassee, FL (died 2/16/18)

Feb. 17, Trey Pringle, 24, Beaufort, SC (died 2/20/18)

Feb. 20, Paul Silva, 39, San Diego, CA (died 3/28/18)

Feb. 22, Ian Frederic Sagucio, 35, Greensburg, PA

Feb. 28, Steven Juarez, 42, Gilroy, CA

Mar. 5, Daniel Emilio Carrillo, 27, Nueces County, TX

Mar. 10, Solomon Agwomoh, 51, Oak Lawn, IL

Mar. 25, Joshua Fuson, 33, Paducah, KY (died 3/27/18)

Mar. 28, Roderic Bernard Cameron, 44, Sonoma, CA

Apr. 12, Christopher Poer, 46, Elbert County, CO

Apr. 25, Michael Snyder, 39, Phoenix, AZ

May 6, Jose Chavez, 25, South Los Angeles, CA

May 12, Gaspar David Guzman, 36, San Antonio, NM

May 21, Donald Whitmer Jr., 46, West Melbourne, FL

May 22, Eddie James Morris, 46, Tallahassee, FL (died 5/24/18)

May 25, Albert Guerra Jr., 35, Lubbock, TX

June 13, Nathaniel Adams McCoy, 32, Carencro, LA (died 6/17/18)

June 18, Ryan Angerstien, 30, Springfield County, OH

July 12, Austin Boyles, 23, Kenner, LA

July 19, Christopher A. Roberts, 32, Jeffersontown, KY (died 7/20/18)

Aug. 1, Jacob Baur, 38, Pleasanton, CA

Aug. 13, Ramzi Saad, 55, Redwood City, San Mateo County, CA

Aug. 16, Marco Napoles Rosales, 28, Fallbrook, CA (died 8/21/18)

Aug. 20, Andru Maldonado, 23, San Juan Capistrano, CA

Aug. 24, Joshua Harvey, 25, Tulsa, OK (died 8/27/18)

Aug. 26, Luis Alberto Luna, 38, Miami, FL

Sept. 11, Antonio May, 32, Fulton County, GA

Sept. 15, Antone Black, 19, Greensboro, MD

Sept. 17, Stephen Romulo Cherry, 50, Long Beach, CA

Sept. 23, Jeremy Allen Conn, 35, Hamilton County, TN

Sept. 27, Nicolas Jesus Garza, 27, Kennewick, WA

Oct. 3, Chinedu Valentine Okobi, 36, San Mateo County, CA

Oct. 4, Jerod Draper, 40, Harrison County, KY

Oct. 24, Joshua Jay Langley, 28, Sioux Falls, SD (died 10/27/18)

Nov. 7, Dana Dean Carrothers, 52, Lindsay, OK

Nov. 26, Nathan Shane Mays, 43, New Albany, MS

Nov. 29, Robert Loggins, 26, Grenada, MS

Dec. 5, Shelby Gattenby, 40, Alameda, CA (died 12/13/18)

Dec. 5, unidentified male, Dallas, TX

Dec. 17, David A. Baker, 32, Aurora, CO

Dec. 27, Mauris Crespos, 34, White County, TN

Dec. 27, Erich Stelzer, 25, Cohasset, MA

Sources: [fatalencounters.org](http://fatalencounters.org); media news reports

Donald E. Wilkes, Jr. is a Professor of Law Emeritus at the University of Georgia School of Law, where he taught for 40 years. He has published more than 110 articles in *Flagpole*. This is his 11th *Flagpole* article on police taser practices. In 2013, Prof. Wilkes and attorney Lauren “Elle” Farmer established the website [Fatal Police Taserings](#).