

Kendrec McDade died in a hail of US police bullets in 2012. His mother still seeks justice

In a moving interview, Anya Slaughter says that all she wants from police is ‘the truth’ about the death of her son. But she now despairs of getting access to it

[Elizabeth Day in Pasadena](#)

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When Kendrec McDade was 14, his mother sat him down and had a conversation about what it meant to be a young black man in America. She told him he had to be careful, that even if he stayed out of trouble the colour of his skin would sometimes unfairly mark him out to the authorities. If he was ever stopped by the police, she advised him to act with caution. In an imperfect world, she said, there were those who would believe – if they saw him on the street at night – that simply because he was black and male he was up to no good. “I taught him his rights,” says Anya Slaughter. She is sitting on a green sofa in her front room, looking at a shifting pattern of sunlight on the opposite wall. “I said to him: ‘I fear for you. I want to protect you. I want you to have better than me. I want you to have everything I had and more.’” She pauses. “Unfortunately he didn’t get it – any of it.”

On the night of 24 March 2012, McDade was shot dead in a Pasadena street in California by two police officers. He was 19, unarmed and had no criminal record. Despite a lengthy legal battle, an independent review into the officers’ actions has yet to be made public. Last month a California appeals court ruled that more than 80% of the report should be published. The police have until Tuesday to file a petition for review. Anya Slaughter is still waiting for answers. She is a single mother to two surviving children – Alana, 13, and Keion, three, who was born the week before Kendrec died. When she was asked to identify his body, she returned to the same hospital where, seven days earlier, she had given birth to his brother. She says, without blinking, that all she wants from the police is “the truth”. Does she think she’ll ever get it? Slaughter gives a tired smile. “No.” She leans forward and lifts up an edge of the rug in front of her fireplace. “They’re trying to sweep it under the rug,” she says, and then she lets it fall.

You might not have heard the name Kendrec McDade. This is the first interview his mother has given to the British media. But it’s important to know his story because of what it represents.

In some respects McDade is tragically just one of many – 219 African Americans have been [killed by police](#) in the US in 2015 alone and nationwide protests have been triggered by a slew of fatal cases played out along racial lines in recent years. In July 2014, a 43-year-old man named [Eric Garner](#) [died](#) after being placed in a chokehold by a white police officer on the pavement of Staten Island, New York. A month later [Michael Brown](#), 18 and unarmed, was fatally shot by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. In April this year, [Freddie Gray](#), 25, fell into a coma while in the custody of Baltimore police and later died of injuries to his spinal cord.