

2014

July 17



Eric Garner dies in NYPD chokehold

On July 17, 2014, two New York Police Department officers confront Eric Garner, a 43-year-old African American father of six, for illegally selling cigarettes. Garner dies after losing consciousness as a police officer locks him in an illegal chokehold, and within hours, a video of the incident begins to spark outrage across the country. Garner was known as a "neighborhood peacemaker" in his Staten Island community, and was also well-known to the police for selling cigarettes illegally near the ferry terminal on Staten Island. Officers Daniel Pantaleo and Justin D'Amico, called to the scene because of a fight that Garner reportedly broke up, exchanged words with Garner about his cigarettes before Pantaleo reached around Garner's neck and put him in a chokehold, despite such a maneuver being against NYPD rules.

Pinned to the ground by the officers, Garner repeatedly told them, "I can't breathe." Eventually, he lost consciousness. He was pronounced dead at a hospital roughly an hour later, and the medical examiner ruled his death a homicide by suffocation. Footage of the incident quickly went viral. There were protests in the days following Garner's death, but it was a grand jury's decision not to indict Pantaleo on December 3 that sparked large demonstrations in New York City and elsewhere across the country.

Garner's last words, "I can't breathe," became a rallying cry for the Black Lives Matter movement. The police officer whose chokehold led to Garner's death in 2014 was fired from the Police Department in 2019 and stripped of his pension benefits. The following year, when New York State repealed its ban on publicizing police disciplinary records, it was revealed that Pantaleo had been investigated for misconduct seven times in the five years before Garner's death.



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