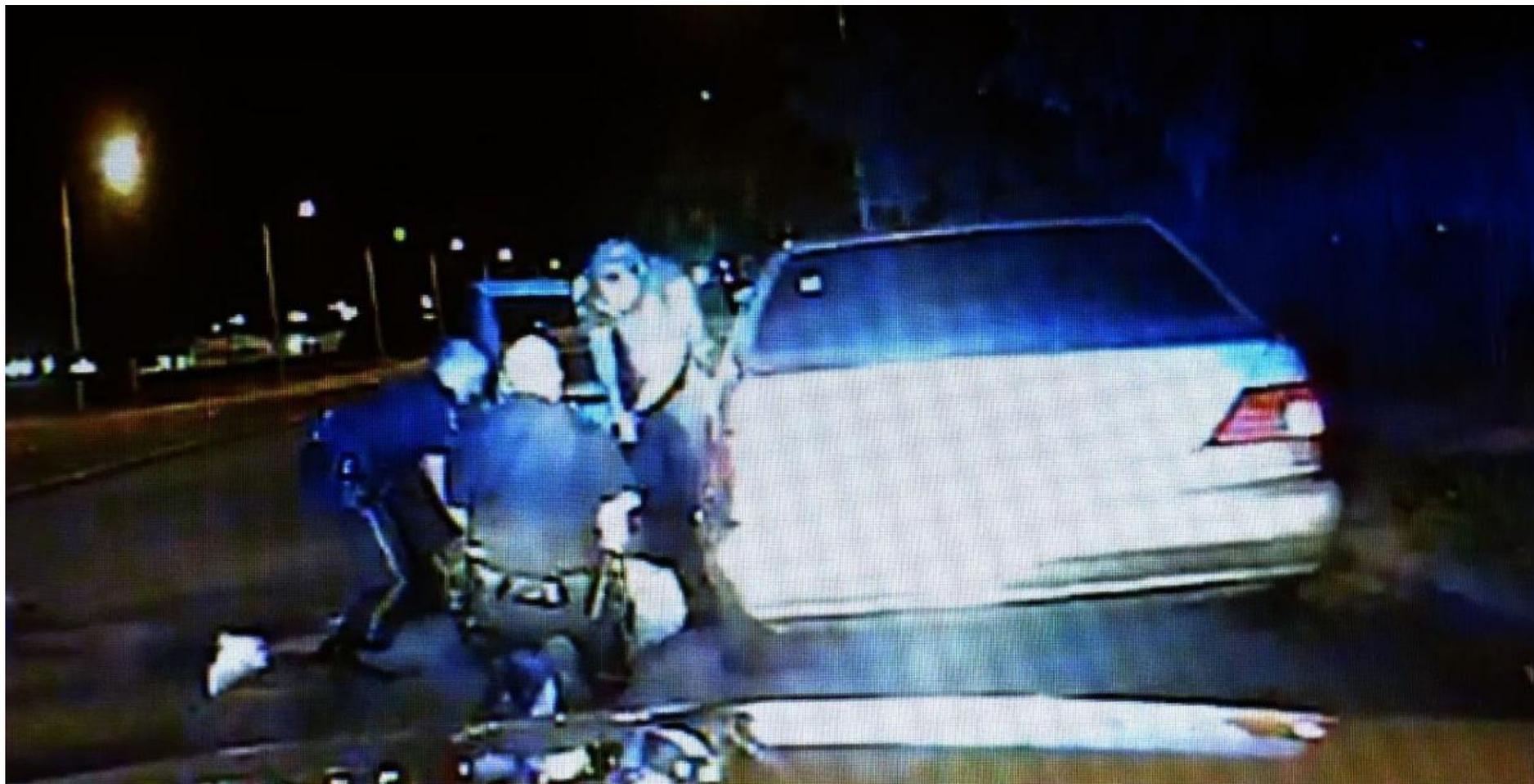


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Men who sued North Charleston, Michael Slager to get \$80,000 over Taser incidents

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Video from a North Charleston police car shows Michael Slager (standing at right) fire his Taser at Julius Wilson, who has a pending lawsuit against Slager. File/North Charleston Police Department/Provided

Two men jolted with a Taser by the same officer who killed Walter Scott will get \$80,000 for dropping their lawsuits against North Charleston.

They were among three people who filed actions in 2015 amid intense scrutiny of the city's police force. An eyewitness video of patrolman Michael Slager shooting the fleeing black man sparked the frenzy.

The men alleged excessive use of the stun gun, though Slager's lawyers have defended his record as exemplary. The issue emerged during Slager's murder trial that ended in a hung jury last year and will likely arise again in his civil rights proceeding this spring.

Without the footage, the suits were unlikely to gain steam. Experts said the evidence gave credence to other claims of abuse. As a result, a state-run insurer will pay Mario Givens \$27,500 and Jerome Stanley \$50,000 for their 2013 run-ins with Slager. Neither was seriously injured.

Attorney Sandy Senn, whose firm represented North Charleston, said officers in South Carolina remain under insured, often forcing police to settle. An anti-police movement, she said, has depleted coffers of taxpayer money used to resolve the cases.

"And make no mistake," she said, "most of the claims are meritless."

Despite legal challenges, federal courts have allowed many police abuse cases to proceed, sometimes taking a hard stance on the issue.

But in an age of high-dollar payouts, the settlements were tame. An Iraq War veteran recently got \$380,000 after alleging unnecessary Taser use by another North Charleston officer. The state's Insurance Reserve Fund has covered heftier claims against the city's police force in recent years: \$250,000 for all of 2012 to \$2.26 million last year.

"The city is happy to have resolved the matters," city attorney Brady Hair said of the recent settlements, "and happy to have resolved them with our insurance coverage."

But Andy Savage, Slager's criminal defense lawyer, has sought to bar any mention of pricey settlements from the trials because they misrepresent the lawman's past, he said.

"He was a gentle police officer," Savage said. "He's not one of those aggressive, over-the-top police officers."

Givens alleged that officers had mistaken him for a burglary suspect when Slager shocked him with a Taser.

He was quick to step into the fray after Scott's April 2015 death, pondering whether a more dogged pursuit of his complaint against Slager would have prevented the killing.

His attorney, Eduardo Curry of North Charleston, also initially brushed off the claim and filed the suit only after seeing the Scott video. It was settled in late January.

"We hope he can close this chapter of his life," Curry said recently, "and move forward."

Stanley was the last to sue.

He had fallen asleep outside his girlfriend's house when officers rapped on his car window. He had been drinking, Stanley admitted, but not driving.

After Stanley honked his horn, Slager pulled him out and tried to handcuff him. But Stanley fought back, Slager said, and the officer zapped him.

A federal judge allowed Stanley's civil rights claims to live on despite his conviction for resisting arrest during the confrontation, a ruling that put Stanley in a position to hammer out a settlement earlier this month. But his attorney, Ravi Sanyal of Charleston, stood by the suit.

"It's been our position all along that Mr. Stanley was minding his own business," Sanyal said. "He was tased by officer Slager for no reason."

Julius Wilson was first to file a lawsuit against Slager, but his is the last remaining.

He was shot in the back with a Taser during a struggle after a 2014 traffic stop.

Wilson's attorneys promised to delve into what they called unconstitutional police practices, and so far, they have succeeded. A judge has allowed the civil rights claims against North Charleston and Police Chief Eddie Driggers to persist.

The suit alleges that administrators often turned a blind eye to excessive force.

In a filing that helped push the case toward trial, a federal magistrate judge wrote: "A complete failure to train officers on when ... the use of a Taser is justified, as alleged by (Wilson), could be deliberate indifference" by the city.

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