

IN SOLIDARITY



Name: Akai Gurley

Dates: November 12, 1986 - November 20, 2014

Place of death: Brooklyn, NY

Akai Gurley was excited about Thanksgiving. He and his fiancé were planning a trip to Florida to introduce their daughter, Akaila, to her grandmother. Akai had just spent 16 of the last 18 months at Riker's Island, incarcerated for dealing weed and crack cocaine. In a letter penned to his fiancé and mother of their daughter who he called "my little twin", Mr. Gurley declared, "Justice of law is never fair, hold on cause my

freedom with y'all is near. My baby girl is growing up an I'm missing major parts of her life," he wrote, promising, "I will never be away from Akaila that long ever again. My baby twin deserves more than just an hour visit once a week with her father. I don't never want them 2 experience the shoes I walked in 27 years of my life now. (It's not cool) Our girls are 2 smart for the gutter they deserve better than what we both been through." Akai Gurley was planning on becoming a rapper and clothing line entrepreneur upon his release. Always known as a fashion plate since his childhood in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, Akai was leaving a neighbor's apartment after getting his hair braided when the tragedy happened.

A rookie police officer, Peter Liang, (also an immigrant-he from Hong Kong) entered the unlighted stairwell on the eighth floor of the public housing development nearly the same time that Akai Gurley and a friend entered the stairwell on the seventh floor. The officer and his partner were there for a usual sweep to rid the area of criminal activity. As usual, there were no lights in the stairwells or halls and the elevators were not working. Liang, holding his flashlight and Glock, fired a shot that ricocheted down the stairwell and cut through Akai's ribs, spine and heart.

Initially, the officers did not acknowledge the shot as an accidental discharge, and they may not even have known that the shot had caused a fatality. Eventually Officer Liang was charged with and convicted of manslaughter. Due to the fact that Liang, an Asian, became the first NYPD officer to be convicted of an on-duty shooting in over a decade, the conviction galvanized the Chinese community in New York City and across the United States.¹ Many felt that Liang was being used as a scapegoat, and Chinese Americans used social media to organize rallies in major cities. Peter Liang appealed the court's decision. In March 2016, the prosecuting Brooklyn District Attorney Kenneth P. Thompson recommended to Judge Danny Chun that Liang serve only house arrest and community service for his sentence. In April 2016, Brooklyn Supreme Court Justice Danny Chun sentenced Peter Liang to five years of probation and 800 hours community service, after downgrading his manslaughter conviction to criminally negligent homicide. The city paid \$4.1 million and the NYC Housing Authority contributed \$400,000 to settle a wrongful-death lawsuit filed by Akai Gurley's family.

July 15, 2020