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Campaign Zero Launches #JusticeforDerontae Demanding Independent Investigation into 2021 Suspicious Shooting of Black Missouri Teenager

Campaign Calls on Department of Justice to Intervene After Jury Overturns Initial Determination of Suicide; Highlights Troubling Inconsistencies, False Statements, and Gaps in Evidence from Madison County Sheriff's Original Investigation

(April 25, 2022) – Marking the one year anniversary of Derontae Martin's mysterious death at a rural Missouri birthday party, Campaign Zero has launched [#JusticeforDerontae](#), a campaign demanding an independent investigation into the troubling questions and inconsistencies around the 19-year-old's killing after a jury deemed it was the result of violence, [overturning the police's original finding of suicide](#).

In April 2021, [Derontae was found dead](#) at the Madison County home of James Wade from a gunshot wound to the head. Derontae was at the Wade home during a party for Wade's daughter.

In the early morning hours of April 25, Wade called 911 and could be heard calmly telling the operator that "apparently, a guy just shot himself." EMTs found Derontae dead with a gunshot wound to the head in the attic of Wade's house.

The Madison County Sheriff's Department did not notify Derontae's mother, Erika Lotts, for several days about the shooting or his death. Instead, Ms. Lotts learned from one of Derontae's relatives a day after police responded to the scene that her son had been shot and killed at a party.

Several days after his death, Ms. Lotts was told by the Madison County Sheriff's Office/Coroner that they had ruled the death a suicide following the autopsy. They concluded the gunshot wound was self-inflicted and fired at close range.

[Suspicious of the coroner's findings](#) knowing that her son had not exhibited any suicidal tendencies, and that he was on the precipice of realizing his dream of playing college football, Ms. Lotts ordered a second, independent autopsy, which revealed inconsistencies from the first examination. As a result, a jury was empanelled in the summer of 2021 to review the case. After only a few hours of deliberation, the jury ruled that Derontae's death resulted from violence, not suicide. And yet, no arrests have been made to date.

"A year later and there are still far more questions than answers about the death of Derontae Martin," **said DeRay Mckesson, Campaign Zero's executive director.** "Campaign Zero's #JusticeforDerontae demands that federal authorities look into the suspicious death, particularly after the initial investigation by

the Sheriff's office was overturned by a jury. It's time that officials outside of Missouri conduct an exhaustive investigation and provide justice and answers to the family of Derontae Martin."

Of the many questions looming over this case are those relating to how authorities investigated the shooting and James Wade, who is the owner of the house where the party was taking place, and the person who called authorities to report the shooting. Wade is [known for prominently flying the Confederate flag](#) at his home, has a history of bigoted social media posts, which include Facebook memes mocking foreign accents, posts glorifying violence against Black people, and posts defending the Confederate flag. He also posted a meme showing a raised middle finger with the text "Here's my apology for being white."

According to [testimony](#) before the jury, a witness named Phillip Lawler, testified that James Wade confessed to killing Derontae, saying, "He just told me he didn't like Black people and used the N-word." He also said Wade told him "that murder was the easiest thing in the world to get by with."

The Missouri Highway Patrol, which assisted in the original investigation conducted by the Madison County Sheriff's office, and is responsible for investigating this case now, appears to have ignored the jury's July 2021 ruling. Campaign Zero is taking these questions to the public to raise awareness and demand answers:

#WhoKilledDerontae, #10Questions

1. Why didn't the Sheriff's office call Derontae's family to notify them of his death?
2. How did Derontae end up in James Wade's attic?
3. Who owned the gun used to take Derontae's life?
4. Why were there so many different reports of what happened that night from partygoers?
5. Methamphetamine was found in Derontae's system despite no prior history of drug use. Was James Wade's home searched for drugs?
6. Why are young people at James Wades' house [ending up dead](#)?
7. Did the Sheriff's office treat Wade's home as a crime scene knowing it had been the site of another alleged suicide a few years prior?
8. Why was Derontae's phone missing data when law enforcement finally returned it to his family?
9. Why was James Wade's polygraph administered to him by a highway patrol trooper instead of a certified polygraph examiner?
10. Why is the Missouri Highway Patrol seemingly ignoring the jury's 2021 ruling that Derontae died by violence?

For more information on this case and the ongoing investigation, visit JusticeForDerontae.com. For more information on Campaign Zero, visit www.CampaignZero.org.

[About Campaign Zero](#)

Campaign Zero is a data-driven organization started by activists to provide people with the information and tools they need to dismantle police unions and end police brutality. Campaign Zero encourages organizers, activists, and policymakers to focus on solutions with the strongest evidence of reducing police violence. For more information, visit www.CampaignZero.org.

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