New York Police Officer Indicted in Fatal Shooting

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Liang, a rookie officer, is to be arraigned Wednesday at a court in Brooklyn.

Akai Gurley, 28, was killed Nov. 20 while leaving the Louis Pink Houses, a public housing complex in Brooklyn.

The 26-year-old Liang and another rookie officer were in the stairwell when Gurley and his girlfriend, a building resident, entered on their way down to the lobby.

Both officers were using flashlights, as the lights in the stairwell were burned out, and Liang also had his gun drawn.

Liang accidentally shot Gurley at a distance of about 10 feet (3 meters), the New York Police Department said at the time.

Gurley's death came four months after another African-American man, Eric Garner, died after a white NYPD officer applied a chokehold while trying to arrest him for allegedly selling untaxed cigarettes.

The 43-year-old Garner, who was asthmatic, died of asphyxiation. The medical examiner classified the July 17 death as a homicide and said the chokehold was a factor.

Even so, a grand jury in the New York borough of Staten Island declined to charge the officer.

The Staten Island decision was announced 11 days after a St. Louis County grand jury declined to indict white police officer Darren Wilson for the Aug. 9 fatal shooting of unarmed black teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri.

“No matter the specific charges, this case is an unspeakable tragedy for the Gurley family. We urge everyone to respect the judicial process as it unfolds,” New York Mayor Bill de Blasio said Tuesday after learning of Liang’s indictment.

The head of the union representing NYPD patrolmen, Patrick Lynch, also called for due process.

“The fact that he was assigned to patrol one of the most dangerous housing projects in New York City must be considered among the circumstances of this tragic accident,” Lynch said in regard to Liang.