

Saskatoon freezing deaths

The **Saskatoon freezing deaths** were a series of premeditated murders of Canadian Aboriginal people in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan in the 2000s. Their deaths were caused by members of the Saskatoon Police Service, officers of which arrested Aboriginal men (usually for drunkenness and/or disorderly behavior), drove them out of the city in the dead of winter, and abandoned them there. The practice was known as taking Aboriginal people for **starlight tours**.^[1]

A Saskatoon Police Service officer in uniform.

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Incidents

A Saskatoon Police Service officer in uniform.

Victims who died from hypothermia include Rodney Naistus, Lawrence Wegner, and Neil Stonechild. Naistus and Wegner died in 2000 and their bodies were discovered on the outskirts of Saskatoon. Inquests in 2001 and 2002 into their deaths determined their deaths were due to hypothermia, with no evidence of police involvement.^[2] The inquest jury's recommendations all related to police policies and police/Aboriginal relations.^[3] Neil Stonechild's body was found in 1990 in a field outside Saskatoon. A 2003 inquest was not able to determine the circumstances that led to his death.^{[2][4][5]}

In January 2000, Darrell Night was dropped off on the outskirts of Saskatoon but was able to call a taxi from the nearby Queen Elizabeth Power Station and suffered no ill effects. The two officers involved, constables Dan Hatchen and Ken Munson of the Saskatoon Police Service, claimed that they had simply given Night a ride home and dropped him off at his own request, but were convicted of unlawful confinement in September 2001 and sentenced to eight months in prison.^{[6][7]} The incident was the subject of the National Film Board of Canada documentary *Two Worlds Colliding* by Tasha Hubbard.^[8]

The Saskatoon police initially insisted these were isolated incidents. But in 2003, police chief Russell Sabo admitted that there was a possibility that the force had been dumping First Nations people outside the city for years, after revealing that in 1976 an officer was disciplined for taking an Aboriginal woman to the outskirts of the city and abandoning her there.^[9]

In December 2010, a young aboriginal man named Evan Maud in Winnipeg accused the police of taking him to the edge of the city at 4:00 a.m., threatening him with a Taser, and taking his jacket.^[10] The police stated that the accusation was false and laid charges against Maud of criminal mischief, after evidence surfaced such as video of Maud boarding a bus 15 minutes after being stopped by police, corroboration by police GPS, and testimony by witnesses that Maud was not wearing a jacket that night.^{[11][12]}

On April 21, 2018, Ken Thomas alleges he was picked up by two Saskatoon Police officers and dropped off outside city limits at night in the cold. This accusation is being investigated. ^[13] ^[14]

In media

A Saskatoon Police Service officer in uniform.

Film

These incidents have been addressed in two films. Darrel Night's experiences were documented in Tasha Hubbard's 2004 National Film Board of Canada documentary *Two Worlds Colliding*, winner of the Canada Award.^{[5][15]} A fictional incident was also portrayed in the half-hour drama *Out In The Cold*, directed by Colleen Murphy and starring Gordon Tootoosis,^[1] Matthew Strongeagle, and Erroll Kinistino.

A Saskatoon Police Service officer in uniform.

Music

In 2005, Canadian punk rock band, Propagandhi released the album *Potemkin City Limits* containing the song "The Bringer of Greater Things" which was "Dedicated to Rodney Naistus, Neil Stonechild and Lawrence Wegner, murdered by members of the Saskatoon Police Department." (Album liner notes) A lyrical excerpt "...The city cops, a sub-zero night. A midnight ride out of town. The passenger was found frozen to the snow. Our enduring legacy."

Canadian musician Kris Demeanor's song "One Shoe" was written about the Saskatoon freezing deaths, particularly Stonechild's. Nicky Mehta's song "Starlight" was also written about the freezing deaths.

In 2017, just before her death, Mi'kmaq artist Cathy Elliott completed a five-week workshop with students from Sheridan College for her new musical *Starlight Tour*. This work was commissioned by the Grand Theatre in London, Ontario^[16] in collaboration with Sheridan Colleges "Canadian Music Theatre Project"^[17]

A Saskatoon Police Service officer in uniform.

Book

- Thomas King: *The inconvenient indian. A curious account of native people in North America. The illustrated edition.* Doubleday Canada, 2017 ISBN 9780385690164 pp. 200–201 (First ed. 2013, without illustr.)

See also

- List of cases of police brutality in Canada

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- ↑ Excerpts from Third Report of Canada on the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (http://www.pch.gc.ca/ddp-hrd/docs/cat/2002/sk-eng.cfm)
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- ↑ https://globalnews.ca/news/4165448/saskatoon-filed-complaint-police-alleged-starlight-tour/
- ↑ https://saskatoon.ctvnews.ca/man-accusing-saskatoon-police-of-conducting-a-starlight-tour-hires-lawyer-experienced-with-the-allegation-1.3916184
- ↑ "Two Worlds Colliding" (http://www.nfb.ca/film/two_worlds_colliding/) (requires Adobe Flash). *Online film*. National Film Board of Canada. Retrieved 15 September 2011.
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External links

- "In Depth: Aboriginal Canadians: Starlight Tours" (http://www.cbc.ca/news2/background/aboriginals/starlighttours.html), *CBC News*
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