



Two sought in S. Phila. killing

Taxicab driver slain in S. Phila.
A slain cabdriver is mourned

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The report crackled over the taxicab's dispatch radio: The driver of cab 108 had been shot.

Fellow cabbie Jarfara Samasa froze. He knew who drove that cab: his cousin.

Samasa immediately called his boss, who gave him the news he had feared: Mamadou Gackou, a 37-year-old immigrant from Senegal, was dead.

Gackou had been shot from behind - at point-blank range - apparently by two passengers early yesterday morning in South Philadelphia. The motive for the attack was probably robbery, police said, although officers found \$400 in Gackou's pocket.

Within hours, at least 100 friends and relatives gathered at Gackou's apartment in the city's Germantown section to mourn, mostly in silence. "We are from West Africa," explained Badidy Niangane, gesturing to those gathered in the courtyard of the Colonial Gardens apartments on the 5400 block of Wayne Avenue. "We have the same roots. We are the same family." Inside the apartment, women in the bright cotton dresses and the head wraps of their homelands sat quietly on the sofa in front of a soap opera on mute. On the phone, a man spoke softly; the occasional English word - taxi, downtown - was audible.

Throughout the city, cabdrivers were shaken by the shooting. Some said they feel vulnerable picking up passengers who need rides into tough neighborhoods.

"I say to people, 'I hope I see you again and nobody kills me out there,' " said Richard Nelson, 31, who has driven for Liberty Cab for four years. "We have families and we are trying to make a living. We are pleading with the city for help."

At noon tomorrow, the Philadelphia Taxi Association will stage a demonstration at Columbus Boulevard and Snyder Avenue to protest Gackou's slaying and to air concerns cabdrivers have about their safety. "I pray every day"

"All we can do to protect ourselves is pray, and I pray every day," said Koita Mahamadou, 32, who drives a cab on the weekends and was relaxing with

some friends outside Baltimore African Market in West Philadelphia. "At first I trusted everybody. But to tell you the truth, now I don't go into certain areas."

Gackou's death also reverberated throughout the city's Senegalese community, which is estimated at 5,000 to 10,000.

Fatou Diaye, owner of Fatou and Fama Restaurant, a Senegalese-cuisine establishment at 61st Street and Lansdowne Avenue, said last night that she was preparing to go over and sit with the family, although she barely knew them.

"We know [of] each other. We have an organization," she said. "The people who know him clearly [said] he was a very good person. . . . He was a very hardworking person, like all the [Senegalese] people in this city." He sought a better life

Gackou, who immigrated about a half-dozen years ago, had driven a cab for about nine months to support his wife, Khoudjedj, and their three children: Souleymane, 6; Aminata, 3; and Bakary, 1. He moved to Philadelphia from Senegal to "have a better life and support his family," said another of his cousins, Ousmane Samassa, 32.

He enjoyed jokes and kept in touch with a wide array of people in the city's West African community, friends said. Many of the people in his apartment yesterday said they talked with him nearly every day.

Police said they found Gackou dead in his City Cab Co. Inc. taxi about 3 a.m. A bullet fired into the back of his right shoulder had pierced his neck. He probably floored the gas pedal after being shot, police theorized, because his cab struck several cars on the 2300 block of South Sixth Street.

Witnesses told police they saw two young men fleeing the cab. The men ran north on Sixth Street, through a small community park, and north on Fairhill Street, Homicide Capt. Thomas Lippo said.

Anyone with information about the robbery is asked to call Homicide Division detectives at 215-686-3334.

Gackou's death followed the shooting of another cabbie last month and the murder of a taxi driver in December in the city.

Nationwide, the homicide rate for cabdrivers is more than four times higher than that of those in the next highly ranked jobs - private security workers, law-enforcement officers, retail cashiers, and retail managers - according to a study by University of North Carolina researchers.

But statistics meant little to those who convened yesterday to pay their respects to Gackou.

When asked if Gackou had been a friend, boyhood buddy Suleimane Nhaganane corrected: "Not friend. Family."