

Police murder in Sacramento, California sparks two days of protests

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The release of footage showing the brutal police murder of 22-year-old Stephon Clark has sparked two days of protests in Sacramento, the capital of California, once again revealing the immense social tensions latent within American society.

Hundreds of protesters marched through downtown Sacramento Thursday evening, occupying City Hall, blocking traffic on streets and Interstate 5, and preventing fans from attending an NBA basketball game played by the Sacramento Kings.

Early on Friday, Oakland attorney John Burriss identified the two officers involved as Terrence Mercadal and Jared Robinet. In the afternoon, roughly 200 protesters again took to the streets of downtown Sacramento, repeatedly clashing with police. In the evening, a vigil was held in honor of Clark and others killed by police, near the site of Clark's shooting. Hundreds gathered to honor his life and then marched peacefully through the nearby neighborhood.

The police murder of Clark, who was unarmed at the time of his shooting last Sunday, is one of the most egregious police killings caught on video in recent years. Body camera and helicopter footage released by police demonstrate that the Mercadal and Robinet never identified themselves as police and made no attempt to deescalate the situation before gunning down Clark. Instead, they immediately shouted, "Show me your hands!" and began chasing Clark into his grandparents' backyard. Once there, one officer shouted, "Gun!" and the two opened up a volley of 20 bullets.

After killing Clark, Mercadal and Robinet continued to act as if he posed a threat, aiming their weapons at him for another six minutes and making no attempt to administer first aid. When backup arrived, the officers handcuffed Clark's lifeless corpse, performed CPR and pronounced him dead at the scene.

In one of the most damning portions of the footage, one of the backup officers is overheard telling the other officers on the scene to mute their microphones, in a transparent attempt to secretly coordinate their story of how the violent events unfolded.

Clark was holding a cell phone when he was killed, with police claiming they thought this was a weapon. One of the primary chants used by protesters Thursday and Friday was, "Cells up, don't shoot! A phone is not a gun!"

Protesters on Friday were more strident in their hostility to the police, at one point surrounding a small group of foot patrol and bicycle cops, holding up their cell phones and chanting, "Cell phones don't kill!" and "Fuck the police!" The surrounded officers then called in for backup and one officer used a billy club to push back the ring of protesters. Protesters attempted to march on Interstate 5 again on Friday but were stopped by roughly a dozen California Highway Patrol officers clad in riot gear and on horseback.

The protests Thursday were organized by Black Lives Matter Sacramento, which presents the issue of police violence entirely in racial terms. In their public statement on Clark's murder, the organization writes, "Once again, the Sacramento Police Department has violently taken another Black life from our community."

The political perspective of Black Lives Matter is mired in identity politics, and inevitably leads to appeals to sections of the Democratic Party. One of the primary aims of Black Lives Matter is to create more diverse police forces and appoint more African Americans to positions of power, including police chiefs, mayors, senators, etc. They have also pushed for the adoption of police body cameras which were in use at the time of Clark's murder.

The facts of the police murder of Stephon Clark ultimately undermine the racist narrative of Black Lives Matter, however, as officer Mercadal and Sacramento's recently-appointed police chief, Daniel Hahn, are both African American.

While African Americans are disproportionately killed by police, the fact is that the largest number of those killed are white. The overwhelming majority of police killings and brutality are directed against the working class, regardless of race, and any attempt to blur this reality serves to divide the working class and plays into the hands of the ruling class.



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