

# Black Lives Matter promotes illusions in African-American police chief after Sacramento police murder

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Amid protests over the police murder of Stephon Clark in Sacramento, California, on March 18, Black Lives Matter (BLM) and other activist groups in the city have sought to direct anger away from the city's first African-American police chief, Daniel Hahn, while promoting illusions in his capacity to "reform" the police department.

The murder of the 24-year-old Clark, who was African-American, in his grandparents' backyard by two Sacramento police officers sparked angry protests starting Thursday morning and lasting well into the early hours of Saturday in California's capital city. Protesters occupied City Hall, blocked highway traffic and confronted riot police in response to one of the most egregious instances of police violence in recent years.

On Wednesday the Sacramento Police Department released body-camera and helicopter video directly contradicting the statements of the officers, identified as Terrence Mercadel and Jared Robinet.

The video shows that the officers never identified themselves as police, immediately yelling, "Show me your hands!" and chasing the startled Clark into his grandparents' backyard, at which point one of the officers shouted, "Gun!" before the two fired 20 bullets into Clark. He was unarmed and holding a cell phone at the time of his death.

Mercadel and Robinet continued pointing their guns at Clark's corpse for six minutes until backup arrived, at which point they handcuffed his lifeless body, briefly performed CPR and pronounced him dead. At one point, one of the officers arriving to provide backup can be heard telling the others to mute their microphones, presumably to allow them to get their story straight

before making their statements about the incident.

The response of BLM and similar groups over the week since Clark's killing has been to try to contain and divert the protests by blaming his murder on systemic racism in the Sacramento Police Department while expressing full confidence in Police Chief Hahn.

"I think [Hahn's] intentions and his heart are in a good place. The system is corrupt so one man being in a position that is seemingly a position of power cannot effectively bring change if the system doesn't want to change," Sonia Lewis, a BLM member and relative of Stephon Clark, told the *Sacramento Bee*.

Another local police reform activist, Berry Accius, commented: "The bigger picture is really that Chief Hahn is not even really the source of our frustration. ... It's the system. If anything, we are trying to help make his job easier because we know that it's bigger than Chief Hahn."

This is entirely in keeping with the racist perspective of Black Lives Matter and other groups mired in the dead-end of identity politics, which present police violence in the United States as a function of systemic racism and white supremacy.

Operating as appendages of the Democratic Party, these organizations advocate cosmetic reforms, including the hiring of more minority police officers and police chiefs, the use of police body cameras and the creation of "police accountability boards" to provide a veneer of oversight over the activities of the police and new positions for minority politicians and local activists.

After the killing of a mentally ill African-American man, Joseph Mann, in 2016, the Sacramento City Council passed a police reform package that included a

video release policy, training for dealing with mentally ill suspects, greater access to non-lethal weapons and a new use-of-force policy which would allegedly reduce the number of fatal police encounters.

Hahn, who is originally from Sacramento, was hired last year as police chief to implement the reforms following a careful vetting process to ensure that the head of the department was seen as “credible” by city’s African-American residents.

The killing of Clark further demonstrates the complete bankruptcy of the perspective promoted by groups such as BLM. The two officers who shot Clark were wearing body cameras at the time of the murder but still made no effort to deescalate the situation before shooting him 20 times. Mercadel, one of the officers who killed Clark, is also African-American.

Meanwhile, Hahn has responded to Clark’s shooting with a combination of perfunctory promises to investigate and hold the officers responsible if they violated procedure on the one hand, and on the other attempting to delegitimize the protests over the killing by presenting them as menacing toward police officers.

In comments Saturday evening Hahn said: “Just think about every officer that is working on that line ... every officer who is sitting at home watching the news, watching the anger toward officers they don’t even know ... then sitting in roll call tomorrow knowing they have to serve the community. So their nerves are high. They are wondering what could come on the next call or around the next corner. ... And my obligation as chief is both to the community and to the officers. I have to ensure that I do everything I can to ... provide an atmosphere for our officers that isn’t violent toward them.”

In reality, the problem of police violence is not fundamentally a function of racism, but of the role of police as the enforcers of the interests of the ruling capitalist class and their domination over a society marked by historic and ever-growing levels of social inequality. This is true regardless of an individual police officer’s skin color or place of birth.

In fact, while African Americans are represented disproportionately among those killed by police, the largest share of victims are white. What the overwhelming majority of victims share in common is that they are members of the working class.

The promotion of representatives of various,

ultimately arbitrary racial categories to participate in suppressing the working class therefore does nothing to alleviate the problem of police violence in America. As their response to the murder of Stephon Clark illustrates, groups like BLM have no answer to the epidemic of police killings, which will require the united struggle of the working class of all races against capitalism and for the socialist reorganization of society.



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