

Democrats seek to use Stephon Clark's funeral to divert anger over police killings

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On Thursday, the family of Stephon Clark held a funeral for the 22-year-old unarmed African American man who was shot twenty times by the police nearly two weeks ago in the backyard of his grandmother's home in Sacramento, California. The Bayside of South Sacramento Church was packed with hundreds of relatives, friends and community members confronting terrible grief of losing a loved one to police murder.

A number of local clergy figures from Christian and Muslim backgrounds introduced the funeral, followed by performances, speeches and prayers. All of the speakers described Clark as an intelligent, warm and loving man who "would do anything for his [wife] Selena and his sons."

In addition to their reflections upon Clark's life, his family expressed their anger at his brutal and unfounded execution by two police officers, who claim to have mistaken a cell phone for a gun. One of his cousins read a poem about the murder, asking, "Enough isn't enough? What, a gun and badge make you tough? Rather shoot someone down and then put them in cuffs... Are they trained and programmed to just kill our family, our kids?"

Since the shocking video of Clark's killing was released, hundreds of people have participated in demonstrations against police violence. Protesters have participated in an occupation of City Hall, vigils and memorials, and marches through downtown and along major streets that have prevented fans from attending NBA basketball games played by the Sacramento Kings.

Responding to the militant social opposition that has emerged in Sacramento, as well as popular outrage across the country, the Democratic Party and their supporters in Black Lives Matter and other activist organizations are seeking to contain, water down and

divert the deep frustrations of the mostly young people and workers.

Reverend Al Sharpton flew in to deliver a two-part eulogy at the funeral as part of an effort to redirect anger back into the dead end of reformism, identity politics and the electoral efforts of the Democratic Party.

Reflecting the ruling class fear of the eruption of popular protests outside of their control, Sharpton declared, "It's time for preachers to come out the pulpit, it's time for politicians to come out the office, it's time for us to go down and stop this madness."

He went on to criticize the Trump administration, which issued a dismissive statement that police violence is an issue for local officials, "This is not a Sacramento fight anymore, this is a national fight... We gonna make Donald Trump and the entire world deal with this issue of police misconduct."

While Sharpton postured as an opponent police violence and denounced Trump, he did not mention the role of the Democratic Party in the militarization of the police apparatus. Nor did he list the thousands of people who were shot by police during Barack Obama's administration, whose Justice Department whitewashed police killings and oversaw the transfer of military weaponry to local police forces.

Just four years ago, Sharpton told protesters to "respect the police" and stop throwing "ghetto pity parties" at the funeral for 18-year-old Michael Brown. Now he claims to be on the same side as the youth and workers who are fighting against police murder, poverty and inequality.

Sharpton and other leaders are also relying heavily on identity politics to distort the fundamental issues of Stephon's murder. At the funeral, one prominent imam insisted, "Black people in this country are not

brutalized because they are Methodist, Baptist, Muslim or Catholic, they are brutalized because they are Black people in America.”

The ideology of these religious leaders and Democratic Party representatives remains far outside of the sentiments shared by many of Clark’s family members and others who have participated in the demonstrations over the past two weeks.

Stevante, Clark’s older brother, has been highly critical of the verbal sympathy by media and political figures. “They’re all in here for money, really,” he said while speaking on stage. Earlier this week Stevante addressed an audience during the occupation of a City Hall meeting after breaking up a meeting of the city council, “The mayor and the city of Sacramento has failed all of you... The gangbanging has to stop. The poverty is uncontrollable.”

Stephon’s aunt, Kimmy Simone, told ABC News on Wednesday, “You just keep looking at these kids over and over—it’s not black. It’s white. It’s all colors,” She continued, “Look at [the] 17 children they killed at that school [Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida]. Look at it. Guns, violence, all that is hate. We don’t need it.”

The protests continued Thursday afternoon as a diverse crowd of mostly young people marched through downtown Sacramento for the third day in a row. Demonstrators held signs reading “Police the police” and “Convict killer cops” at the federal courthouse and District Attorney’s Office, as they demanded arrests and convictions for both police officers, one of whom is an African-American.

Over the weekend, millions of students, youth and workers in the United States and internationally participated in the protests against gun violence and school shootings. Despite the efforts of the Democratic Party and its operatives to divert the protests toward various dead ends, wide layers of the working class are mobilizing against mass violence, police killings and the broader attack on democratic rights.



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