

Sharpton, George Floyd attorneys address memorial service for Hunter Brittain

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A memorial service for of 17-year-old Hunter Brittain, who was shot and killed by police during a traffic stop, was held Tuesday morning in the auditorium of Beebe High School, in the Arkansas town of the same name, 36 miles northeast of Little Rock.

Brittain was gunned down without warning by a Lonoke County sheriff's deputy, Sergeant Michael Davis, as Brittain exited his vehicle, grabbing a blue antifreeze container. Both the victim and his killer were white.

After an appeal by the family to attorneys and advocates for the family of George Floyd, the black man murdered by police in Minneapolis last year, attorneys Devon Jacob and Benjamin Crump are now representing the Brittains. Reverend Al Sharpton and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) participated in the memorial service, along with the two lawyers.

Because the family is white, as were most of those attending the memorial service, Sharpton had to largely shelve any racial rhetoric, as both he and Crump spoke at the ceremony.

"The issue of policing is not about black and white," said Sharpton at the auditorium, "It's about right and wrong."

Most of those who addressed the memorial service were friends and family, who mourned the slain teenager, many issuing eulogies.

Hunter's uncle, Jesse Brittain, took to the podium. "I want to start off by saying, 'Hunter, I love you, son, and I miss you.'" Choking up, he continued, "Your life had meaning. You're loved. Your family will not stop advocating until we have justice for you, Hunter. And also, justice for all our other brothers and sisters dying at the hands of law enforcement hired to protect and

serve us around this country."

A huge round of applause followed.

"These unjust killings happening around our country demand sacrifice from each of us. We'll have to stop all this civil unrest, black and white, people dying at the hands of the police. I will not apologize for these killings because unarmed people die every day, like my nephew, Hunter, without the benefit of a trial." He concluded, "Qualified immunity must end for law enforcement officers in this country."

"I never thought anything like this would happen until it hit so close to home," said Scott Hendrickson, whose son was close friends with Brittain. "Once it happened to my son's best friend, I said it could happen to my son so it was too close to home to not do anything about it."

George Floyd died in May 2020 when Derek Chauvin, a white Minneapolis police officer—aided and abetted by three other cops, one black, one Asian, and one white—used his knee to pin the handcuffed black man's neck to the ground. The police murder of Floyd sparked international protests against police brutality and racism. These protests were multi-racial and multi-ethnic in character.

Sergeant Davis has been fired by the Lonoke County sheriff's office, not for the killing of Brittain, which is under investigation by the state police, but for not activating his body camera when making a traffic stop at 1:30 in the morning.

Prior to the memorial, Brittain's friends and family called for change at the state level, with petitions urging the state legislature to require police officers to wear body cameras that would be turned on, and remain active, as soon as their shift begins and throughout.

"Hopefully, Hunter and his untimely death will finish what Hunter's brother—George Floyd—and his death

started,” Devon Jacob said, referring to calls during the Floyd case similar to those in response to the killing of Brittain.

Crump and Jacob made mention of others who have perished unjustly at the hands of police, such as Breonna Taylor, a Kentucky woman shot to death in her own home. “Because he is not here, we all have to unite together and make sure people all over America know that we will get justice for Hunter Brittain,” Crump said.

Rather than make overtly racist appeals—impossible under the circumstances—both Crump and Sharpton appealed instead for protests to state and national politicians, both Republican and particularly Democratic.

Crump said, “We came here today to all proclaim a unity that America, President Biden, the governor of Arkansas, and people all over the world will stand up with us and say, ‘Hunter Brittain’s life matters,’” whereupon the crowd began chanting the slogan.

Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson, a Republican, issued a public statement July 2, nine days after Sergeant Davis murdered Hunter Brittain, stating provocatively, “Last week, we lost another police officer in the line of duty, and if we could pass a law to guarantee we will never lose another one, then I would pass it and sign it today.” He has made no mention of the police killing of Brittain.

President Biden, on the morning Brittain was killed, said it is “not a time to turn our backs on law enforcement.” Biden is identified with law-and-order politics going back 30 years, when he spearheaded legislation in Congress which led to a dramatic increase in the imprisonment of working-class men and women, particularly African American.

Trying to accommodate his rhetoric to the reality of a young white man murdered by a white cop, Sharpton told reporters before the memorial service, “Hunter did nothing wrong, just like we felt George Floyd did nothing wrong,” concluding, “But if we *segregate* how we react, then we’re wrong.”

He continued, tacitly admitting the class character of the killing, “I don’t know if Hunter was in a rich neighborhood, with a certain clothes [sic] on that night, driving a certain car, whether this policeman would have acted that way... I don’t know what the reason is, but I do know an unarmed 17-year-old young man

should have been given the benefit of due process, and not be shot down and not be considered guilty until proven innocent.”

NAACP representative Kwami Abdul-Bey, of the Jacksonville, Arkansas branch, responded just as awkwardly during an interview with KATV (Little Rock), when he was asked whether Brittain’s case would be handled differently if he were a person of color. He responded, “We might be having a different conversation, but we would still be having a conversation.”

Abdul-Bey continued, “We don’t need to parse out our fight as this victim was black and this victim was white. If they’re a victim, they’re a victim, and they all need to be respected as victims of police violence. There are some communities who may not have responded in the way that they’re responding now if Hunter had been black. They are able to see what *we* see every day.”

The truth is that more whites are killed by police than blacks or Hispanics, a fact that is generally ignored by the advocates of racial politics. So far this year, 440 people have killed by police, according to Statista.com. Of the 440, 130 were white, 74 black, 39 Hispanic, 4 “other,” and 193 unidentified. These numbers show that 2021 is well on its way to reaching 1,000 police killings, the yearly average for nearly a decade.



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