

Demonstration Held Condemning Police Killing of African American in Detroit Suburb

St. Clair Shores cops gunned down Theo Gray in November while he attended family gathering

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Over 100 people gathered outside police headquarters in a suburban municipality east of Detroit to demonstrate against the failure of local authorities to hold several police officers accountable in the shooting death of 29 year old African American Theoddeus Gray.

Gray was shot six times from the rear while he was walking away from officers outside Lakeland Manor banquet hall in St. Clair Shores, Michigan on November 4, 2018.

Within a matter of two weeks Macomb County Sheriff Anthony Wickersham had cleared the law-enforcement personnel of any wrong doing. This decision follows a long held pattern in the United States where police routinely kill African Americans and other people of color without fear of disciplinary action let alone criminal prosecution.

A crowd composed of many family members and friends of Theo Gray rallied and marched at St. Clair Shores police headquarters on the afternoon of Saturday August 3. The group spoke out about the unjust use of lethal force and the distortions perpetuated by the police and the corporate media involving the circumstances of the incident on November 4.



Demonstration demanding justice for Theo Gray outside the St. Clair Shores police station on Aug. 3, 2019 (Photo by Abayomi Azikiwe)

Spokespersons for the family noted that the initial explanation for the shooting of Gray

centered on the culpability for the death of a police dog identified as "Axe." Law-enforcement officials claimed Gray had shot the dog prompting them to take down the young man in a hail of bullets.

This story was later changed by St. Clair Shores police and the Macomb County Sheriff. Relatives of the deceased say that all of the evidence leads to the conclusion that the law-enforcement officers had shot the animal to death themselves while firing at Gray.

Family members who were eyewitnesses to the killing said that the six wounds inflicted upon Gray were in the rear of his body including the head, back, thighs, legs and feet. They also emphasized that there was no threat posed to the officers by Gray therefore his death was completely unprovoked.

Five police officers fired 48 shots at Gray. He was pronounced dead at a hospital as a result of the six bullets which struck him.

Law-enforcement Review Seeks to Justify Killing

In order to address public concern about the killing of Gray, Wickersham and St. Clair Shores Police Chief Todd Woodcox held a press conference on November 28 at the Macomb County Sheriff's office. Wickersham stated that a further ballistic investigation was needed to determine the cause of death of the police animal.

A public funeral was held for Axe at the Assumption Greek Orthodox Church in St. Clair Shores where tens of thousands of dollars were raised. No public apology or acknowledgment of wrongdoing was made by either the St. Clair Shores police or the Macomb County Sheriff's office in regard to the brutal death of Gray.

According to an article published by the Detroit Free Press, citing statements by law-enforcement officials in Macomb County:

"After the dog was struck, he ran back toward Lakeland Manor and was found by a side door, Wickersham said. Axe was taken to an animal hospital and died. Wickersham said ballistics information is pending on bullet fragments found inside the police dog on its left front leg and right shoulder blade. Gray's FN57 5.7mm pistol is believed to have jammed after he fired the first shot, Wickersham said. He said the gun was found under Gray, and that a loaded, AK47 semi-automatic rifle was found next to the banquet hall, though he released no additional details about that weapon." (See [this](#))

This same above-mentioned report presented the police rationale for the killing of Gray, noting:

"'There was gonna be a shootout in St. Clair Shores that night,' Wickersham said. City police said officers responded to the hall after receiving calls of a man with a rifle outside. About 70 people were inside, police said. 'Upon officer arrival, a male matching this description was observed standing outside the banquet hall,' an initial news release from St. Clair Shores Police stated. 'The male ignored several demands from officers and attempted to flee the scene on foot.'"

Family members of Gray were accused by police of refusing to participate in the investigation during the aftermath of the killing. Wickersham said during the press conference that through an attorney letters were sent to the family of Gray and no responses were received.

An attorney for the family, Vince Colella, said he had received no correspondence from the Macomb County Sheriff. Colella emphasized that it was up to law-enforcement to conduct the investigation and not the family of Gray.

Family Demands Justice

Members of the Gray family have contacted the newly-elected Democratic Attorney General for the State of Michigan Dana Nessel requesting another probe of the case. Nessel announced on August 2 that she would review the evidence for possible future legal action.

However, several members of the family and friends of Gray expressed skepticism related to the statement made by the State Attorney General. They want immediate action aimed at bringing the killers to justice.

A Facebook page has been set up entitled “Justice for Theo Gray.” Family spokesperson Oliver Gantt addressed the demonstration on August 3 at the St. Clair Shores police station stressing that further demonstrations will be held. (See [this](#))

Members of the Detroit-based Moratorium NOW! Coalition attended the August 3 protest in St. Clair Shores providing a sound system which was utilized during the picket line and rally. An organizer for the Moratorium NOW! Coalition spoke to the crowd pledging unconditional support, along with inviting those present to the August 10 gathering in downtown Detroit commemorating the second anniversary of the Charlottesville, Virginia disturbances where neo-fascist and racists marched through the city advocating violence against oppressed people.

Heather Heyer, an anti-racist activist, was killed when neo-Nazi James Alex Fields, Jr. rammed his vehicle into a crowd of counter-protesters on August 12, 2017. Dozens of anti-racist activists were injured as a result of Field’s actions and other racists who had gathered that weekend to oppose the removal of a statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. Fields was arrested, prosecuted and sentenced to life in imprisonment for his crimes.

The police killing of Gray and the subsequent exoneration of the law-enforcement officers in St. Clair Shores is by no means an isolated incident. Over the last five years, there have been countless demonstrations across the U.S. in response to police brutality and terrorism directed against African Americans and other people of color communities.

In a report published by The Root website which covers issues related to African American affairs, 1,165 people were killed by police in 2018. A large percentage of these victims were disproportionately African Americans.

This publication says in its conclusion to the article that:

“There were only 22 days in all of last year where police didn’t kill someone. Despite all the protests, marches, training seminars, thoughts and prayers, in 2018, cops killed 36 more people than they did the year before, according to Mapping Police Violence and the Washington Post. And despite being 12.6

percent of the U.S. population, Black people were 26.7 percent of the people killed by police where the race was known. The number of Black people killed by police in the last year (215) was more than all the police who died in the line of duty (148), U.S. servicemen killed in action (2) and Americans killed by Islamic terrorists (0) combined." (See [this](#))

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