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Killing of unarmed black man roils California's capital city

By Sophia Bollag and Don Thompson

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) - The fatal shooting of an unarmed black man by Sacramento police has roiled California's capital city, leading to a protest that shut down a freeway and delayed an NBA game at the downtown arena. Stephon Alonzo Clark, 22, died in a hail of police gunshots Sunday night in the darkened backyard of the home where he had been staying with his grandparents. Police say they thought he was pointing a handgun but they found only a cellphone nearby.

Here's what's known about the case - and what's still unclear:

WHAT LED TO THE SHOOTING:

Sacramento police say two officers responded after 9 p.m. Sunday to reports of an unidentified man breaking car windows. Deputies in a Sacramento County Sheriff's Department helicopter said they spotted the suspect and reported that he had picked up a toolbar and broken a window in a residence.

Two officers on the ground ordered the suspect to stop and show his hands, but he ran into a backyard of his grandparent's home. Police say he turned and advanced toward the officers while holding an object in front of him.

The officers believed it was a firearm and feared for their safety, the department said. They fired 20 times.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS:

The officers called for backup and waited about five minutes instead of immediately providing medical aid. Video recordings released this week seem to indicate they feared the suspect might still be armed and dangerous.

A responding officer told others to mute the microphones on their body cameras. It's not clear why and the department hasn't said whether that violated department policies.

Moreover, there is no evidence from the audio recordings that the officers identified themselves as police, said civil rights and personal injury attorney Ben Crump, who was retained by the Clark family.

THE FALLEN MAN AND THE OFFICERS:

Clark was the father of two sons, ages 1 and 3, and the fiance of Salena Manni.

"He was goofy, he was funny, he was loving. He liked shoes," brother Stevante Clark told The Sacramento Bee. "He was a playboy, he was smart, he was an athlete, he was charismatic."

Court records show he had several brushes with the law, none involving a firearm. Since 2014 he pleaded no contest to felony robbery, misdemeanor loitering with the intent to engage in prostitution and misdemeanor assault. He was sentenced to probation, a sheriff's work program and was required to complete a batterer's treatment program.

Sacramento police have declined to release the names of the officers involved in the shooting, saying they've been receiving death threats.

Police say the officers, one of whom is white and the other black, have two and four years of experience with the department, and both have four years of prior law enforcement experience with other agencies. They are on paid administrative leave.

THE ATTORNEY:

Crump is best known for representing the families of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, both young black men shot to death in racially tinged incidents in Florida and Missouri, respectively.

"We are looking into every aspect of this tragic killing, how this young man was executed in his backyard, especially in light of the fact that he had no gun," Crump said. "He made no threats against the police."

He said the police actions show poor training. He plans to meet with Clark's family this weekend, and said the firm will do its own investigation including an independent autopsy.

THE POLICE CHIEF:

Sacramento Police Chief Daniel Hahn, the city's first black police chief, promised transparency and to work for better community relations since he took charge last year. Mayor Darrell Steinberg praised Hahn for releasing the videos within four days of the shooting instead of the 30 days required by city policy.

Steinberg said the department has improved its policies since the fatal shooting of a mentally ill black man, Joseph Mann, in 2016. He said the City Council will address some of the public's questions including the department's use of force policies and training at a meeting April 10.



This May 8, 1964 file photo shows Linda Brown Smith standing in front of the Sumner School in Topeka, Kan. The refusal of the public school to admit Brown in 1951, then nine years old, because she is black, led to the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court overruled the "separate but equal" clause and mandated that schools nationwide must be desegregated. From the time Americans roll out of bed in the morning until they turn in, and even who they might be spending the night with, the court's rulings are woven into daily life in ways large and small. (AP Photo, File)

Linda Brown, central figure in school segregation case, dies

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) - As a girl in Kansas, Linda Brown's father tried to enroll her in an all-white school in Topeka. He and several black families were turned away, sparking the Brown v. Board of Education case that challenged segregation in public schools.

A 1954 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court followed, striking down racial segregation in schools and cementing Linda Brown's place in history as a central figure in the landmark case.

Funeral officials in Topeka said Brown died Sunday at age 75. A cause of death was not released. Arrangements were pending at Peaceful Rest Funeral Chapel.

Her sister, Cheryl Brown Henderson, founding president of The Brown Foundation, confirmed the death to The Topeka Capital-Journal. She declined comment from the family.

Sherrilyn Ifill, president and director-counsel at NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund Inc., said in a statement that Linda Brown is one of a band of heroic young people who, along with her family, courageously fought to end the ultimate symbol of white supremacy - racial segregation in public schools.

"She stands as an example of how ordinary schoolchildren took center stage in transforming this country. It was not easy for her or her family, but her sacrifice broke barriers and changed the meaning of equality in this country," Ifill said in a statement.

The NAACP's legal arm brought the lawsuit to challenge segregation in public schools before the Supreme Court, and Brown's father, Oliver Brown, became lead plaintiff.

Several black families in Topeka were turned down when they tried to enroll their children in white schools near their homes. The lawsuit was joined with cases from Delaware, South Carolina, Virginia and the District of Columbia.

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that separating black and white children was unconstitutional because it denied black children the 14th Amendment's guarantee of equal protection under the law. "In the field of public education, the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place," Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote. "Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

The Brown decision overturned the court's Plessy v. Ferguson decision, which on May 18, 1896, established a "separate but equal" doctrine for blacks in public facilities.

"Sixty-four years ago, a young girl from Topeka, Kansas sparked a case that ended segregation in public schools in America," Kansas Gov. Jeff Colyer said in a statement. "Linda Brown's life reminds us that by standing up for our principles and serving our communities we can truly change the world. Linda's legacy is a crucial part of the American story and continues to inspire the millions who have realized the American dream because of her."

Brown v. Board was a historic marker in the civil rights movement, likely the most high-profile case brought by Thurgood Marshall and the lawyers of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund in their decade-plus campaign to chip away at the doctrine of "separate but equal."

"Her legacy is not only here but nationwide," Kansas Deputy Education Commissioner Dale Dennis said.

Oliver Brown, for whom the case was named, became a minister at a church in Springfield, Missouri. He died of a heart attack in 1961. Linda Brown and her sister founded in 1988 the Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research.

The foundation says on its webpage that it was established as a living tribute to the attorneys, community organizers and plaintiffs in the landmark Supreme Court decision. Its mission is to build upon their work and keep the ideals of the decision relevant for future generations.

"We are to be grateful for the family that stood up for what is right," said Democratic state Rep. Annie Kuether of Topeka. "That made a difference to the rest of the world."

Former Dem powerbroker Fitch slated for Senate appointment

HALIFAX, N.C. (AP) _ A former powerbroker in North Carolina's General Assembly is ready to return to the legislature to fill a newly vacant seat.

The Daily Herald of Roanoke Rapids reported Sunday that a local Democratic Party committee picked Milton "Toby" Fitch Jr. to fill the state Senate seat for the rest of this year. The Rocky Mount-area seat opened after Sen. Angela Bryant resigned Monday and took a \$117,000 job on the state parole commission.

Fitch represented Edgecombe and Wilson counties in the state House from 1984 to 2001. He was influential at a time that Democrats largely ran state government and after Republicans took control of the House in 1995.

Fitch retired last month from his position as a Superior Court judge, a role he held for more than 16 years.

Part of bridge will be preserved along Purple Line trail

SILVER SPRING, Md. (AP) _ Officials say part of a historic Maryland bridge that served as a lifeline to African-Americans during segregation will be preserved on a recreation trail that'll run along the future Purple line.

Montgomery County officials say the Maryland Transit Administration has agreed to save the steel girders from the Talbot Avenue bridge when it's torn down to make way for the light-rail line.

The Washington Post reported March 20 that longtime residents of Lyttonsville, which was founded in 1853 by a free black laborer, have been fighting for years to preserve the bridge's history.

County officials closed the bridge in May after it failed a safety inspection.

Tim Cupples, Montgomery's coordinator on the state's Purple Line project, says the county and state are still discussing how much the preservation project will cost and who will pay for it.

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