

# NYPD shooting claims life of another black male

By Herb Boyd

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NEW YORK (NNPA)—When Alberta Spruill succumbed to cardiac arrest in May after police mistakenly raided her Harlem apartment in search of drugs and weapons, Melvin "Rocky" Sylvester, her close friend, was among her mourners.

On last Thursday, at Abyssinian Baptist Church, hundreds gathered to pay their final respects to Sylvester, who was shot and killed by police last Friday morning.

"They really loved each other," said James Sylvester, referring to the relationship between his brother and Spruill. "Now, they are dead, both killed by the police."

Sylvester, 65, was shot by a Black plainclothes police officer, who claimed that the victim was wielding a knife

when he shot him in the chest. The incident occurred Aug. 8 just after midnight on the corner of 131st Street and Seventh Avenue in front of the St. Nicholas Houses, where Sylvester lived with his wife and children.

According to police, Sylvester rushed the officer while he was searching Sylvester's son, William. The officer, whose name has not been disclosed, shot Sylvester once in the chest. There was no report of the police confiscating any weapons at the scene.

"They say he had a knife and charged the officer, but he could have shot him in the leg or the arm," James Sylvester told the Amsterdam News.

"Rather than trying to halt somebody, they always seem to shoot to kill. They didn't

have to kill him."

His brother said that hours before Rocky was killed he had been up for hours, seeing about his daughter who was in the hospital giving birth to a child just hours after Sylvester was killed.

"He was sleepy, and that might have accounted for actions that the officer mistook," he explained.

Luther Matthews and David Brown knew Sylvester for many years, and they voiced their disgust at losing their dear friend.

"To say Rocky had a knife and was attacking someone is not characteristic of his behavior, and I've known him all of my 59 years," Matthews said.

"He was a good family man who not only provided for his children, but he helped all of us, especially me."

Said Brown, "There is no way I'll ever believe that he was acting in such an aggressive manner. He was a gentle, caring father, always looking for a way to help anybody in distress. That's how I'll remember him."

James Sylvester, who works for the New York State Capital Defenders Office, said he was disturbed by reports that his brother had a record.

"This is just part of the police's way of justifying their actions," he began. "They say my brother had a rap sheet, but that's not true. All of the charges against him after he was arrested were dismissed. There is no way they could have known about these charges without illegally unsealing records. I know all about this because that's the kind of work I do."

The family is considering its legal options.

"We are not interested in discussing any of the legal remedies we may seek at this time," said James Meyerson, the family's attorney. "Now is the time to lay Melvin to rest with dignity. After his funeral we will reveal our plans and how we will seek justice on his behalf."

Assemblyman Keith Wright asked rhetorically, "Why was such force used against this man? Professional negligence such as this cannot be tolerated any longer in this community or in any other part of the city. This has happened too often for police not to use greater restraint in their actions."

Wright probably was thinking of Spruill; Ousmane Zongo, the West African merchant who was killed by

a police officer shortly after Spruill; and Calvin Washington, who died from cardiac arrest after police wrongfully kicked in the front door of his home in Brooklyn last month.

Last Saturday several people marched in protest of the shooting, and near the spot where Sylvester fell a miniature shrine has been placed in his name.

James Sylvester promised to honor his brother with the same generosity his brother expressed while alive.

"We will have a feast of food and I'm inviting the whole community to come and eat after the funeral in memory of my brother," he said. "This is something he tried to do for all of us when he walked among us. And that's the least I can do."

Herb Boyd writes for The Amsterdam News.

## MLK

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Church should be taken out and placed in a history museum. In 1978, Spencer W. Kimball had a vision where priests could be of any ethnicity. Blacks were excluded from that position for a long time. Today, we look at a church organization that is run by a white male, surrounded by 12 white men."

King continued saying: "It's not that these men ordained of God are bad men, but others of other ethnic persuasions are ordained by God, too. Leadership must be di-

verse if we are to create a better world. 1978 was just the start of the race. In fact, you have not circled the track. We live in a nation where top leadership always sets the tone."

King told the gathering he and others went back to Memphis, Tenn. earlier this year so the organization he heads "could have a resurrection."

The Lorraine Hotel in Memphis was where Dr. King was gunned down by an assassin's bullet on April 4, 1968. Dr. King founded and once led the Southern Chris-

tian Leadership Conference.

"The objective is to redeem the soul of America," King said. "It takes a village of men and women to bring about change. Change is painful. Most importantly, it doesn't happen by osmosis. We want to be a social change agent who bring about change."

In the "I Have A Dream" speech, King said most ignore his father's call for economic justice. In 2003, 14 million Americans are listed as living in poverty, while another 3 million to 4 million

are homeless.

"In a nation that has so much wealth, this is a shame," King said. He said the nation's operating budget for 270 million to 280 million people is \$2 trillion to \$3 trillion. "That doesn't include state, city, town and corporate budgets. There are 44 million people without health insurance."

"Everybody out to be able to have a decent job with decent pay," King said.

He opposes the war in Iraq and the \$4 billion a month it

costs. "How are we going to finance this war?" he asked. "Our troops are being killed. How are we winning? We can't impose our views on a system that we don't understand. You can't root out terrorists by terrorizing others."

"Women and men of goodwill most come together not to decide what direction America is going in, but in what direction that God wants us to go. I don't believe that God ordains a lot of the things we have done. What I'm saying is at the end of the day we

must all repent for that which we have done wrong. Memphis has not been held accountable. No one ever apologized to my family and me. Healing starts with an apology."

Cost of King's lecture was covered by a grant from the Smith-Pettite Foundation and directed at scholarly understanding from a non-Latter-day Saint speaker relevant to current social and political issues. King was the first speaker in what is expected to an annual lecture.



Photo special to Sentinel-Voice

### DIRECT CONNECT TO SERVICE

Members of Detroit Connection Inc. and Sista to Sista celebrate their partnership inside Just For Kids. Detroit Connection Inc. recently donated \$1,500 to Sista to Sista. Just For Kids, is a clothing, furniture and bookstore enterprise at 2401 Bonanza Road. The store has items for infants, children and teens and a portion of its proceeds go to benefit minorities infected with HIV/AIDS. Pictured from left to right: Detroit Connection Vice President Wesley Agnew, Sista to Sista Assistant Director Irene Battle, Detroit Connection President Beverly Collins and Sista to Sista Founder Dr. Reva Anderson.

## Wine

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kind of a massive suicide, mass genocide, because they are destroying the underpinning structure of the black family. In some cases we are worse off now than we were 35 years ago."

Todd reminded the audience that Black clubs and lounges played a role in the civil rights struggle beyond that of a place where people hang out, get down or drink.

"Long before white establishments allowed Black entertainers to perform, even on the Strip here in Las Vegas, we created places like the Moulin Rouge to house Black performers because they weren't allowed to stay in white establishments" he said.

Throughout the years Cal-Pac has been instrumental in developing business strategies that resulted in wholesalers and distributors in the liquor industry increasing hiring African-Americans and reinvesting in local

communities, particularly through non-profit organizations.

One of the objectives of Cal-Pac is to encourage and assist as well as work with those individuals, groups and agencies presently committed to the task and cause of community welfare and civic progress.

Since 1972, Cal-Pac has worked to improve educational opportunities of disad-

vantaged high school students. They formed a scholarship fund to assist students who might otherwise have to forgo furthering academic achievement due to the cost of attending college. Hundreds of vocational and academic scholarships have been awarded to deserving students that have made a positive impact. They not only earn college degrees, but go on to reinvest their talents back into the community.

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