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Black Lives Matter activists denounced by mothers of victims for exploiting deaths of Tamir Rice and others killed by police

Samaria Rice, the mother of Tamir Rice, and Lisa Simpson, the mother of Richard Rishner, released a joint statement Tuesday accusing activists associated with the Black Lives Matter movement of profiting from the police killings of their children.



December 15, 2014 photo of Samaria Rice [Credit: AP Photo/Mark Lennihan, File]

Tamir Rice was just 12 years old when he was shot and killed by Cleveland, Ohio, police officers while playing in a park in 2014. Rishner, 18, was gunned down by Los Angeles police in 2016. Both killings and the decisions not to bring criminal charges against the

officers involved have fueled mass protests against police violence in the US and internationally.

“Tamika D. Mallory, Shaun King, Benjamin Crump, Lee Merritt, Patrisse Cullors, Melina Abdullah and the Black Lives Matter Global Network need to step down, stand back, and stop monopolizing and capitalizing off our fight for justice and human rights,” the statement said.

“We never hired them to be the representatives in the fight for justice for our dead loved ones murdered by the police. The ‘activists’ have events in our cities and have not given us anything substantial for using our loved ones’ images and names on their flyers.”

“We don’t want or need y’all parading in the streets accumulating donations, platforms, movie deals, etc. off the death of our loved ones, while the families and communities are left clueless and broken.”

The statement also said the attorneys who frequently offer to represent the families of African Americans killed by police were “misleading” them in their effort to seek justice. Rice said she questioned if Ben Crump, one the most prominent of these attorneys, held a genuine understanding of Ohio’s state laws while he worked her son’s case. Rice fired Crump several months into the case.

Crump has been involved in civil rights lawsuits such as those over the 2012 vigilante killing of Trayvon Martin and the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor last year. Crump’s involvement in these cases, which have ended in multi-million dollar settlements, has earned him a position among the highest-paid lawyers in the US, with a net worth of about \$5 million. His law firm’s website prominently features a “breaking news” reel announcing his role in the recent \$27 million Minneapolis paid to George Floyd’s family and a \$411 million verdict in a Florida truck accident.

Rice’s and Simpson’s statement included a series of demands including that everyone they named should step down from the “spotlight,” and financial assistance for Simpson, who says she is facing homelessness and never received any financial assistance from the BLM organization which campaigned to raise \$5,000 for her son’s funeral. Simpson said she

never saw any of the money raised and was excluded from the BLM-led movement surrounding her son's death.

Over the past weeks, Rice denounced several activists and celebrities on social media for exploiting popular anger over police brutality. On March 7, Rice criticized the Black Lives Matter Global Network for raising \$90 million in 2020 but not “doing right” by families affected by police violence.

On Facebook, Rice ranted against rapper Lil Baby's Grammy Awards performance featuring a spoken word poem by Tamika Mallory, co-founder of activist group Until Freedom and former Executive Director of Al Sharpton's National Action Network.

The performance opened with a re-enactment of a police officer shooting a black man during a traffic stop, and featured Lil Baby walking through smoke-filled streets as he delivered his lyrics. In the middle of the song, Mallory delivered a poem where she said black people were in a “state of emergency” and demanded “justice, equity, policy and everything else that freedom encompasses” from the Biden administration.

“Look at this clout chaser, did she lose something in this fight? I don't think so,” Rice said in a post with a partial recording of the poem. “That's the problem they take us for a joke, that's why we never have justice cause of s-t like this.”

As news of Rice's criticisms spread, writer Shaun King responded with a blog post claiming his empathy with her “pain, grief, and fury.”

“Mostly, my heart just breaks for Samaria Rice—whose pain, anger, grief, and fury we must try to understand,” King stated. “Ultimately, what I know is that a grieving mother like Samaria Rice has every right to be skeptical and hurt and suspicious and cynical. She wasn't born that way, but this evil and unrelentingly racist country forced her into that corner. It's our job to gracefully and patiently help her find her way out.”

However, King went on to defend Mallory for her “fierce and serious message” she delivered on stage.

“I know Tamika very well—and this just isn't true,” King stated. “Her only intention with her performance ... was to use an important cultural moment to speak truth to power and

call out President Joe Biden on his lack of movement on justice issues. It took tremendous guts.”

Many responded negatively to King’s post on social media, calling him “patronizing.” Rice shared a link to King’s post with the caption “Shaun King you are the problem too.”

Rice and Simpson’s criticisms are not unfounded and expose the fraudulent nature of racist politics, which have proven a lucrative venture for those called out by the mothers and others.

Corporations have pledged hundreds of millions of dollars to the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundations and other organizations like it. Meanwhile, the Biden administration has elevated minorities to positions in the highest levels of the state.

Most recently, an Ohio man was accused of defrauding donors of \$450,000 using the Black Lives Matter name. According to the U.S. Attorney’s Office, Tyree Conyers-Page is accused of creating a non-profit Facebook page titled “Black Lives Matter of Greater Atlanta” to solicit donations he spent on himself. Page spent the money to purchase property in Toledo, Ohio, as well as entertainment, clothing, hotel rooms and firearms.

Black Lives Matter and other identity-based movements speak for a privileged layer of the middle class which seeks to elevate itself to ever-higher income levels through racial politics. The Democratic Party has worked through a variety of activist organizations to redirect popular anger behind promises of police reform while working to divide the working class through racial identity politics.

Identity politics only serves to obscure the united class interests of the working class. A successful fight against police violence, social inequality and racism can only be led by an international socialist movement which unites the working class across all artificial barriers.

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