

## Lakeland protesters declare: 'Not in Our - Ledger, The (Lakeland, FL) - January 26, 2019

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LAKELAND — Hundreds of protesters chanted "Not in our generation" as men in black suits wore red rope nooses around their necks, symbolizing black men who were hung in early American slavery.

Exactly one month after the death of 17-year-old **Michael Jerome Taylor** at Salem's Fresh Eats in Lakeland, supporters of a Rally for Justice after the Lakeland Police officer-involved shooting gathered in downtown Lakeland to protest the shooting and call for justice. The protest took the form of a funeral, led by a hearse and a motorcade, while hundreds stood on the sidewalks.

The march made its way from Salem's Fresh Eats on Memorial Boulevard where Taylor was shot, to the steps of the Lakeland Police Department, where the men were instructed by megaphone to remove the nooses and lay them on the steps.

Taylor's mother, Kris Irving, who carried yellow and red roses for her son, led the group.

Promoters of the march included Young Adult Ministry, a group of Apostolic young adults from the Church of God the Bibleway and the Poor Minority Justice Association, in addition to several family members, friends, churches from all across the country, and others who supported the cause.

They marched with one goal in mind, "Justice for Mike."

After stopping at the police department, the large group made its way to Munn Park, where church youth groups brought special music, and a church drill team performed.

A casket symbolizing all the black youths shot by police officers in the United States was brought to the front of the proceeding in the park.

Friends hugged one another, some took phone videos, and a few hundred folding chairs were assembled for the event.

The Rev. Lawrence Edward led the group in prayer and the drill team followed with "We are marching, taking our voice back," and chanting "stop, please don't shoot ... we care about our lives and yours, too."

Young men and women took turns declaring what their futures held, "I am not Martin Luther King," a young girl said, "but I have a dream."

"I want to be a photographer," one said, and another "I want to be a psychologist."

Later in the program, they held signs that read "Who killed Mike?"

The group declared that their goal was to spread positive messages.

"Just because you have a past does not mean you don't have a future," they said.

LPD spokesman Gary Gross said adjustments were made to bring extra officers in for the day.

As for any statements on behalf of the department, Gross said Police Chief Larry Giddens stands behind his Dec. 26 statement about the shooting and would not make any official statements during the march because of pending litigation.

The LPD confirmed all the officers involved in the incident at Salem's were back to work.

On Dec. 26, Taylor was shot and killed by Lakeland police officers at Salem's Fresh Eats while allegedly accelerating the car he was driving toward officers and hitting other vehicles and the wall of a local business. Police had been called to Salem's because of a crowd of 150 to 200 people who had gathered after a local nightclub had closed. The car Taylor was driving had been reported as stolen.

Since the shooting, Lakeland Police met with Salem's corporate offices to talk about better crowd control.

There are now earlier hours for the dining room and only the drive-through is open later in an effort to ease the congestion, police said.

In a phone interview with The Ledger in late December, Taylor's mother said that she thinks her son was scared with so many people around the car with their guns drawn, and said she needed closure in the matter.

Irving said she felt the community's support in "countless messages and phone calls" after her son's death. She said she had many questions as to how her son ended up driving the car, and noted that "without excessive force, Michael would still be here today."

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