

Gangsters' paradise

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FULL TEXT

Headnote

POLITICS

After protesters were ejected from a fund-raiser for the City Council's Black Caucus, the aldermen had a little fun among themselves.

"Black Caucus, Black Caucus

They don't really care

Black Caucus, Black Caucus

Always backs the mayor

Black Caucus, Black Caucus

They don't vote with us

Black Caucus, Black Caucus

Now your time is up!

Now your time is up!

Now your time is up!"

So chanted a cluster of young people gathered outside the Chicago Aldermanic Black Caucus's annual fund-raiser at a Loop cocktail lounge last Wednesday evening. Just an hour before, the Civilian Office of Police Accountability had released body camera footage of the June 6 police shooting of 24-year-old Maurice Granton Jr. Inside the lounge, more activists from Black Lives Matter, BYP100, and other groups confronted black City Council members about their support of the Chicago Police Department. Ardamis Sims of GoodKidsMadCity and Assata's Daughters interrupted remarks by 34th Ward alderman Carrie Austin shouting, "No cop academy! No cop academy!" in protest of the city's plan to build a \$95 million police training facility on the west side.

"Shut up," Austin bellowed in response. The fund-raiser attendees erupted in cheers of approval. "Goodbye!," she shouted as Sims was pushed out of the lounge by security. "We're here to have a good time; if you want to protest take it outside."

"They must not know we got gangsters in here," 20th Ward alderman Willie Cochran chimed in, egging on the crowd. Last year Cochran—a retired police officer who's been indicted on fraud, bribery, and extortion charges—announced he wouldn't be running for reelection.

"If anybody else wanna protest you better take it outside," Austin said, laughing. "'Cause I guarantee you ain't seen no gangsters like this city's aldermen."

All of this was caught on video by other protesters inside the lounge. Watching in the crowd outside were also the sisters of Maurice Granton Jr.

Joanna Varnado, Granton Jr.'s 31-year-old sister, said she'd come to the protest that night in the hopes of hearing a response from aldermen about the killing of her brother. Since the incident, she said, her family hadn't heard from any elected officials. "I just wanted some answers," she said. "Everybody knows my brother was murdered, and I wanna know how [the aldermen] feel."

Her impression, she said, was that "they didn't care. Some of them were drunk. They was in there partying, eating, dancing, laughing." It stung especially hard, she said, because these were black officials. "These are our people.

When you see stuff like that it's like, Is there gonna be justice?"

Varnado said she appreciated the support of the youth protesting the event. "They showed us love and respect for my brother-it felt good," she said.

Sims, a 21-year-old from Washington Park, said he wanted to interrupt the gathering of aldermen because "they were talking about stuff that didn't relate to us, our people, our community." Sims remained at the protest, chanting, and helping with the die-in outside after being ejected. Watching the video of Austin and Cochran's comments later, he said he was hurt. For the aldermen to call themselves gangsters seemed particularly crude to him given the violence in the city. He says it was a reminder that young people need to be registered to vote and to be self-reliant: "Use your head, think, 'cause we all we got."

Austin didn't return calls for comment. Cochran, reached at his ward office last Thursday, laughed when asked what he meant when he referred to the aldermen as "gangsters."

"It was a joke," he explained.

@mdoukmas

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