
Outrage mounts over the brutal beating of Tyre Nichols by five police officers

(from New York). On January 7, Tyre Nichols' name and blood entered the history pages of Memphis and the United States as symbols of a widespread culture of dehumanisation of black people despite civil battles and legislation. The name of this young African-American father, beaten up by five police officers who were also African-Americans themselves, recalls the case of Larry Payne, a sixteen-year old African American teenager killed by the police in March 1968 for taking part in a strike. The city that saw the death of Elvis Presley, was also the site of the assassination of Martin Luther King on April 4 that same year and of 17-year-old Elton Hayes in 1971. Tyre Nichols, was unfamiliar with the brutality of Memphis' vicious past. He happened to be there by chance during the pandemic. He was travelling to the Tennessee city from Sacramento, California, to visit his mother, but ultimately he decided to stay due to a set of circumstances. That fatal night he was on his way back to his mother's house when he was stopped by the police for a traffic stop - yet to be determined - and beaten to death. The name of his mother was tattooed on his arm beaten by the police. He cried out for his mother "Mom, Mom, Mom" in a desperate attempt to quell the violence of the police officers, who brutally assaulted and beat him, oblivious to the fact that they were being filmed by police body and surveillance cameras. Tyler died after three days from the "physical abuse" described by the Memphis police chief, an African-American woman, as "heinous, reckless and inhuman." The five officers were fired and are now facing charges of second-degree murder, assault, and kidnapping. First responders were also placed under investigation and charged with negligence. The footage of the officers' brutal assault, with "acts that defy humanity", was released last Friday, sparking off protests throughout the country. Tyler's mother RowVaughn Wells called for peaceful demonstrations. Protesters in Washington projected the face of this young skateboarder and photography enthusiast on the walls of buildings. Pastors of various African-American Protestant churches did their best to prepare worshippers for "a horrific video, where racism reached unacceptable levels." This time, black citizens were not attacked by white police officers, but by African-Americans who assaulted a member of their own community, "indicating that this violence has deeper ramifications in law enforcement culture and is something that is hard to eradicate." More than 17,000 deaths caused by police have been misclassified since 1980. The Diocese of Memphis has called on the faithful to pray the Rosary for peace at the Cathedral on January 27. In a number of messages on Twitter, Bishop David P. Talley called for peace and prayers for the city. "We call for peace in our city. Let us pray that a spirit of unity, love and peace may guide our thoughts, actions and words," the bishop tweeted. The Episcopal Church of West Tennessee called for taking action, insiting that "changes in law enforcement policies and procedures are necessary so that no one else will have to experience what the Nichols' family is going through." The Knights of Peter Claver and Ladies Auxiliary, the largest and oldest African American Catholic lay fraternal order, released a statement in which they emphasised that "Nichols is one of many black victims of police misconduct", which shows that "on too many levels and in too many different ways, the sanctity of human life is increasingly devalued and despised". The long history of the order has seen too many deaths like Tyre's. They urge to "identify and root out the evil, hypocritical cultures that plague our country." The Memphis police chief sent out a powerful message, by disbanding the special squad the officers belonged to, created specifically to counter acts of violence. US President Biden said he was "outraged and deeply pained to see the horrific video of the beating" and called on Congress to vote on the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, stalled by Republican US senators for months. President Biden spoke to the mother and stepfather of Tyre Nichols, in the awareness that "nothing can bring them back their beloved son." And in fact RowVaughn Wells said he continues to wait for Tyre to open the front door at 7 p.m., at the end of his shift at FedEx, announcing that he is ready for dinner. What remains of their son is his website, "This California Kid", that starts with an invitation: "Welcome

to the world through my eyes", in which Tyler asked his followers to comment on photos of skateboard stunts and sunsets. The last footage, which he filmed before being fatally beaten, is still in his videocamera.

Maddalena Maltese