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# Gettysburg Against Gun Violence

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# Gettysburg Against Gun Violence

## **Abstract**

On April 4th, the 50th Anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Saheed Vassell, a 34 year old black man, was shot nine times and killed in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, NY. Plain clothes police officers responded to several calls complaining of a man walking through the streets pointing gun at people. They later found out that Saheed was unarmed, and the object in his hand was merely a showerhead.

Saheed had a history of mental illness, and was diagnosed with bipolar disorder years prior. He was well known by longtime residents of the neighborhood who described him as quirky and harmless. He would often wander aimlessly through the neighborhood offering to help carry bags and sweep the floors of local barber shops.

Like Saheed, my younger brother Aaron also has a history of mental illness. He was diagnosed with bipolar disorder as a young boy and suffers from episodes just like the one that cost Saheed his life on April 4<sup>th</sup>. It is because of him that I stand here today. When I first learned about the killing of Saheed my heart ached.  
[excerpt]

## **Keywords**

Black Lives Matter, Gettysburg Against Gun Violence, Gettysburg College, gun control, gun violence, mental illness, police, Race, Saheed Vassell, Stephon Clark

## **Disciplines**

Civic and Community Engagement

## **Comments**

Surge is a student blog at Gettysburg College where systematic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at [surgegettysburg.wordpress.com](https://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com) Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that -isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

# SURGE

[ VERB ] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

## GETTYSBURG AGAINST GUN VIOLENCE

April 23, 2018

***Editor's Note: Last Friday, April 20, 2018, Gettysburg College students organized a campus-wide walkout to protest all forms of gun violence as part of Gettysburg College's first annual Peace and Justice Week. Over the next several days, SURGE will be publishing the poems and personal testimonies of the student speakers who participated in the event.***

On April 4<sup>th</sup>, the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Saheed Vassell, a 34 year old black man, was shot nine times and killed in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, NY. Plain clothes police officers responded to several calls complaining of a man walking through the streets pointing gun at people. They later found out that Saheed was unarmed, and the object in his hand was merely a showerhead.

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Stephon Clark, another black man gunned down in his grandmother's backyard in Sacramento, California because he "fit the description" of a suspect accused of breaking windows in the neighborhood "wearing a black hoodie and dark pants." Police allegedly claim that he advanced toward them with an object in his hands, but investigators only found a cellphone near his body. **They fired 20 rounds. He was shot eight times, including 6 times in the back.**

Unlike Nikolas Cruz, these men were not given the chance to stand before a trial. They were not given due process. Instead, they were gunned down because their very existence as black men puts an automatic target on their backs.

I chose to highlight these two instances because they are the most recent and they resonated with me personally. I worry for my brother Aaron because, like Saheed, sometimes he doesn't understand social cues. Sometimes, he's a little too loud and a little too aggressive, and the chemical imbalance in his brain causes him to lose touch with reality. And I know that because of the color of his skin, the wrong move could cost him his life.

These instances are part of a bigger national trend of deadly force used on communities of color at the hands of the people who are meant to protect them. Saheed and Stephon represent the need for criminal justice reform. We, as students and the next generation of leaders, must stand up like so many of our predecessors did and continue to fight against these systems that perpetuate inequality and seek to disenfranchise vulnerable populations. We **must** address the state violence that has been inflicted on communities of color for generations.

We must combat gun violence in **ALL** of its forms.

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