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# NOLA UPDATES

## New Orleans breaks its silence

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Patrick Strange / NOLA.com

What many thought would be a relatively small and solemn procession to City Hall in observance of recent New Orleans murders, specifically the slayings of Marigny resident and local filmmaker Helen Hill on January 4 and Hot 8 Brass Band drummer Dinerral Shavers on December 28, quickly swelled into a city-wide march encompassing citizens from all neighborhoods of New Orleans.

Holding signs with slogans ranging from the direct, "Stop the Violence," to the deeply personal, "Six Family/Friends Murdered Since July ... It's Personal Now," New Orleans citizens, school children and business people converged at City Hall in numbers that easily reached into the thousands, with some estimates placing the total at over 3,000 participants. Not just a gathering to remember those killed, the protest turned into an outpouring of grief, frustration and anger about a rising crime rate that has terrorized the city.

Numerous speakers representing several neighborhoods and community groups of New Orleans addressed the large crowd on the steps of City Hall. With Mayor C. Ray Nagin and city council members looking on, speakers called for increased accountability from elected officials and members of the New Orleans Police Department. Above all, community leaders implored New Orleans citizens to unite in both the struggle to combat crime in their neighborhoods, and the sometimes Herculean task of making sure public officials are doing their duties.

Speeches were sometimes fiery and arresting, such as that of Rev. John Raphael Jr. from the New Hope Baptist Church who called for racial unity and said that New Orleans should not be "drowned in the blood of its citizens." Other speeches were desperate and grief stricken, such as the poignant address of Dinerral Shavers' sister, Nakita, who fought back tears as she recounted the life of her brother and her delicate hopes for a city on the brink.

Mentioning that she was currently attending college elsewhere, Shavers said that she plans to come home after graduation, but fears that if the violence continues there might not be a "New Orleans to come back to."

After organizers and community representatives addressed an emotional and sometimes restless crowd, they asked for a moment of silence for all those killed in an ever-worsening crime wave. Though most fell silent, angry shouts periodically interrupted the collective pause, demanding a response from the mayor and other officials.

Afterwards, organizers explained that the march was about "citizens having a chance to have their say" and that the mayor would "soon have his."

As of January 11, New Orleans has reported nine murders since the beginning of the new year.

Below are several audio clips of participants and organizers explaining their motives in the march and why they came to show their support. Click the links to listen.

### Baty Landis

helped organize the portion of the march that began on the foot of Canal St. She explains that the main reason she got involved was that she had to speak out against New Orleans crime that has taken far too many of her friends and loved ones. [Listen](#)

### Otis Fennell

is a business owner in the Marigny neighborhood of New Orleans and a long-time resident of the city. Fennell also sees the present state of New Orleans as dire, but believes in the power of a collected effort by the citizens to make a change. [Listen](#)

**Sarah Fontenelle** is a resident of the Irish Channel and came to support those who have lost loved ones to violence and hopes that the day's message will not fall on deaf ears. [Listen](#)

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