The funeral was a juncture for Muslims and Christians, city politicians and black nationalists, hip-hop rappers and preachers, Crips and Bloods.

Hundreds of people crowded into Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Los Angeles on Tuesday to mourn the death of 13-year-old Devin Brown, who was shot and killed Feb. 6 by a Los Angeles Police Department officer at the end of a car chase.

The mourners filled the congregation hall to capacity, overflowing into an adjacent room and onto the sidewalk. Balcony seats were shared by other mourners and media members, who dangled cameras and microphones over the railing.

The service was at times solemn, punctuated by organ music, a resounding choir and pledges of support for Devin's mother, Evelyn Davis. At other moments, orators fired the crowd with cathartic shouts of defiance and outrage at the media for its depiction of Devin's life and the police for what they considered a bad shooting.

Devin's death has generated much attention across South Los Angeles, though people are viewing it in different ways.

Most of those attending the service appeared to believe that the police acted wrongly and that Devin was an innocent victim, but others have said it is too early to judge the police actions.

City Council members Martin Ludlow, Bernard C. Parks, Janice Hahn and Jan Perry sat near the front of the sanctuary. Power 106 FM radio deejay Big Boy was in the audience, and hip-hop rap artist Snoop Dogg and comedian and radio personality Steve Harvey were publicly thanked for helping pay for the funeral.

Bow-tied members of the Nation of Islam flanked Devin's white, lacquered casket and manned all the doors, standing ramrod straight. Female members of Louis Farrakhan's organization were ushers.

The Brown family filled several rows at the front of the hall. Devin's mother sobbed throughout the service. At times she rested her head upon her daughter.

Devin was killed about 4 a.m. at the end of a pursuit. According to police, Officer Steve Garcia and his partner were on routine patrol near Gage and Grand avenues when they saw a maroon Toyota Camry run a red light. The officers followed the car onto the Harbor Freeway and tried to pull the driver over.

A three-minute chase ended when the driver of the Toyota — police said it was Devin — left the freeway, lost control of the car and drove onto the sidewalk. The officers then parked their patrol car behind the Toyota. A 14-year-old passenger fled.

Police said that Devin backed the Camry into the right side of the patrol car and that Garcia fired 10 times, killing the boy. Police say the car was stolen, although the officers who pursued it were unaware of that.

Charlie Rushing, pastor of Slater Street Missionary Baptist Church in Los Angeles, gave voice to the community's skepticism and anger over the shooting.

"If you want change in the community, get rid of those police officers who put a black mark on your record," Rushing said, referring to the LAPD. "You can"t stay silent and you can"t cover up. Forget about city liability. Forget about the code of silence. What about your humanity? What about your sorrow for taking a human life? This mother needs an apology."

Rushing used his remarks to comment on the controversies that have arisen from the shooting and defend Devin's mother.

"Whatever that child was doing out at that time of night, he should not have been killed," Rushing said. Devin's father died of a heart attack last year and his mother has had to hold two jobs, the pastor added.

"She is a good mom!" Rushing exclaimed. Voices in the crowd responded, shouting, "Yes!" and "That's right!"

"Any one of us could have had a child with a notion to go out at that time of the morning," said Rushing, at times indicating a group of mothers sitting near the choir. All of them had lost sons to violence, he said.

"What's wrong … is thinking that if we go out at that time of morning, we might not come back."

Rushing also singled out Police Chief William J. Bratton for criticism, calling him "Wyatt Earp," and denounced LAPD rules that allow officers to shoot into cars when they believe that their lives are in danger. Rushing urged city officials to ban the practice.

"This policy of shooting at moving vehicles endangers not only those inside the car, but those around the vehicle," the pastor said. (The Los Angeles Police Commission delayed a vote Tuesday on a new draft policy that is intended to limit officers" discretion when firing into moving cars.)

Tony Muhammad, the local leader of the Nation of Islam, brought the congregation to its feet when he vowed to hold city leaders accountable for Devin's death and said that it "will be the straw that breaks the camel's back."

"It's time for black people to stand up," he said. "We"ll police ourselves! Look what this little brother's life has done — it has brought together Muslims and Christians and Jews, Bloods and Crips."

Gesturing to Chad Richardson, Devin's companion on the night of the shooting, Muhammad said, "He was with Devin when he was brutally murdered."

Outside the church on Western Avenue, people who said they were members of a gang arrived in a limousine outfitted with chrome rims and hydraulic suspension.

Sporting camouflage and gas masks, the Black Riders Liberation Party lined up in front of the church and practiced military drills under a red, black and green banner.

Across the street a truck pulled a trailer into view with a billboard that read: "The Black American Slave Holocaust."

A number of evangelists handed out pamphlets warning of Judgment Day and urging all to forsake sin.

Malik Spellman, a 41-year-old gang intervention specialist for the community group Unity 2, said he was heartened that the peace among rival gang members who attended the service had held Tuesday. But he said he would take a "wait and see" attitude regarding the pledges of support for the Brown family.

"It's unfortunate that we"ve got to wait for a funeral to meet. I"ve been to too many of these," he said. "At a funeral, a lot of things get said. We"ll see if anything comes from it."

Cathy Youngblood, 53, didn"t know Devin or his family, but ditched her college anthropology courses to attend the funeral out of solidarity.

"It baffles the community why this happened," she said.

Youngblood said the most moving part of the service was at the beginning, before the sanctuary had filled up.

The casket was open for viewing. Youngblood peered through the lace veil into Devin's face.

"I thought: This ain"t nothing but a baby," she said.

Source