

FUNERAL=PROTEST

Beloved activist remains political even after death, laying a powerful statement before the White House by Bob Roehr



The politics of mourning: Steve Michael's funeral procession on Pennsylvania Avenue

AIDS activist Steve Michael, who died May 25 at the age of 42, wanted a political funeral. It was his final request, and it was honored.

The drumbeat was slow and solemn as Michael's funeral procession wound its way through the streets of the nation's capital on June 4. His mother, Barbara, and Wayne Turner, his partner of seven years, led the cortege. Behind them rolled the casket holding Michael's body; mourners strained to push it up the incline of 15th Street toward the White House.

They stopped in the street in front of the mansion and, with measured ceremony, opened the coffin. Michael lay within the white satin lining, stiff and waxen in death, dressed in a



Wayne Turner and Barbara Michael view the deceased to white T-shirt with ACT UP emblazoned on his chest.

"In 1992, [Bill Clinton] made very clear and specific promises, commitments to people living with HIV disease and to a nation living at risk," said Bill Freeman, former executive director of the National Association of People With AIDS. "And where are we now? This is a president who said the right thing and did the wrong thing. Integrity isn't something you take off a shelf and put it on when you want to."

Freeman praised Michael as "a man whose words followed his deeds." He then pointed toward the White House and, referring to Clinton, said, "There sits a man whose words are used conveniently."

Turning to the coffin Freeman added, "Great

necessity calls forward great leaders. Here is a great leader." Pointing again across the fence, he continued, "There is an empty suit."

Michael's finest hour was when he was "hounding and haunting the president," said Michael's former presidential running mate, Ann Northrop. "And I remain secure in the knowledge that he will haunt this president forever."

She added: "Bill Clinton is a murderer. This death and tens of thousands of others must be laid at his doorstep.... We will not rest until this crisis is over. We will not rest until the crises of poverty, race, class and gender that drive this epidemic are over."

Fellow activist Michael Petrelis recounted first meeting Michael in 1992. He recalled how Michael urged, "We have to hold Governor Clinton accountable, just in case he makes it to the White House."

Petrelis added: "Let's remember all of the broken promises, lack of needle exchange, lack of full education about prevention of AIDS."

"I have one thing to say to the president: Clinton lies, we die."

Bishop George Stallings called Michael "a man of deep passion who pursued justice wherever there was injustice.... He was a man who gave his life in defense of human rights and human dignity."

Turner, meanwhile, said: "Barbara and I are here to say goodbye to someone who we both loved very much. The man sitting in the building behind us promised us six years ago that, if elected president, he would make AIDS a top priority of his administration."

"This president committed—to this man lying here right now—that he would launch an all-out research effort to find a cure for AIDS," continued Turner, "that he would appoint an AIDS czar to lead this country's efforts against this epidemic. He promised universal health care, regardless of the ability to pay. The man who lives in the White House made those promises and did not keep them...."

"Shame on you Bill Clinton. Shame on you. Bill Clinton, you say you feel my pain. Bill Clinton, you have caused my pain."

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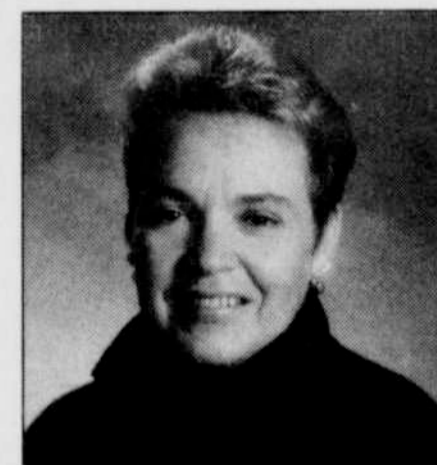
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