Florida teen charged as adult in school shooting death

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A 15-year-old Florida teenager is being held in police custody and faces murder charges following the shooting death of a fellow student at a Fort Lauderdale high school last Wednesday, November 12.

Teah Wimberly, a sophomore at Dillard High School, has been charged as an adult in the murder of her friend Amanda Collette, also 15. She faces charges for first-degree murder and discharging a weapon on school grounds, and is undergoing psychiatric evaluation.

Students at Dillard High said that Wimberly and Collette were longtime friends, and that Wimberly had recently expressed a romantic interest in Collette, which the latter rejected. According to reports, the two began an argument between classes Wednesday, and as Collette walked away, Wimberly shot her once in the back with a .22 caliber hand gun.

Wimberly then ran across the street to a fast food restaurant and called the police, turning herself in. She said later in an affidavit that she "wanted her [Collette] to feel pain like me."

Both girls attended their school's performing arts magnet program. Wimberly, an honors student, played tuba, bassoon and saxophone. In 2006 she won a scholarship to a music camp hosted by the Gold Coast Jazz Society. Wimberly and Collette had been close friends since elementary school.

Wimberly had been experiencing serious emotional problems ever since her father began serving a 25-year prison sentence in December of 2007 for attempted second-degree murder. Court documents indicate that Wimberly has exhibited behavioral problems at school.

Her attorney described her as "a very troubled young girl." He said that Wimberly struggled with her sexual orientation, concealing it from her grandparents and from the clergy at her church. The night before the shooting she cut herself with a razor.

Wimberly's neighbor said of the incident "Something must have driven her to do this. She is smart and talented." He added, "She dressed like a tomboy, but was very polite and kept to herself. I can't believe it.''

Teah Wimberly's story is a familiar one: a troubled youth driven to a desperate act of violence against an undeserving victim. While the media have treated Wimberly more sympathetically than is typical, the same cannot be said of the prosecutor's office, which plans to charge Wimberly as an adult, a phenomenon that has become increasingly common.

In July 2001 in Broward County Florida, 14-year-old Lionel Tate was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison without parole. Tate was 12 when his six-year-old playmate died of injuries caused by Tate as he acted out moves he had seen on a TV wrestling show.

Later than same month, another Florida teenager, Nathaniel Brazill, was charged as an adult and convicted of second-degree. He received a 28-year sentence for the May 2000 shooting death of his seventh grade teacher at a middle school in Lake Worth. Brazill was only 13 at the time.

The *World Socialist Web Site* commented on this

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trend of charging young offenders as adults following Nathaniel Brazill's sentencing hearing:

"There was a time not so long ago when juveniles were treated differently in the criminal justice system. The trials of Nathaniel Brazil, Lionel Tate and other children as adults have been made possible by changes in laws in virtually every state over the past decade…. The entire judicial framework has shifted so dramatically that the distinction between prosecuting adults and juveniles is becoming more and more blurred….

"What is rarely questioned in the media, however, is the legitimacy of prosecuting a child as an adult. No one cries out: these are children! Laws prohibit them from driving a car, purchasing alcohol and cigarettes, voting or serving in the military, but they are allowed to be prosecuted according to adult laws and sentenced to draconian prison terms, in some instances in adult facilities where they face physical and sexual assault. The century-long tradition of the juvenile justice system's role in protecting and rehabilitating the youth in society has been turned on its head."

A serious examination of the not uncommon phenomenon of school shootings, and tragedies involving children and guns, would turn to the social relations that give rise to them. School shootings do not occur in a vacuum, but are committed by real people with real problems—in a social system with unprecedented levels of social inequality, where the political establishment promotes police repression at home and exports military aggression abroad.

The attendant economic pressure on working people in the form of layoffs, foreclosures and financial instability in general, is immense. A study by the American Psychological Association conducted from April to September found that 80 percent of Americans suffer stress about their personal finances, with over half worrying about their ability to meet their families' basic needs.

Teenagers, in particular, face complex challenges as they seek to navigate their way through an increasingly violent world, where their prospects for the future seem more and more uncertain. Time may reveal more about the particular circumstances that led to last week's shooting at Dillard High School, and the personal problems and motivations of Teah Wimberly.

But while the situation cries out for an examination of the social questions that ultimately lie at its heart, as in the overwhelming majority of such tragedies, the response of the authorities has been to scrutinize security at the school and to charge the young offender as an adult.

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