

Detroit house fire kills nine-month-old child

Bryan Dyne, Lawrence Porter
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Early Saturday morning a fire on the 12000 block of Promenade, on Detroit's east side, took the life of a nine-month-old child. The cause of the tragic blaze is unknown at this time. The Wayne County Medical Examiner issued a report stating that the child, Akira Perkins-Williams, succumbed to smoke inhalation.

The extended family, involving as many as 10 to 12 people, are presently homeless and are being assisted by the Red Cross. It is believed the fire took place on the lower floor of the two-story flat where the family lived.

The WSWs spoke to neighbors who played a critical role in helping to rescue the family,

"We heard kids screaming, and saw the woman who lives in the downstairs flat with three kids running down the street screaming 'There's another baby in the house!'" explained Torea Maxwell, 21, who lives two doors from the house where the fire took place.

Torea said the grandmother threw three children from a window in a desperate attempt to get everyone safely, but could not get the little baby.

"One of her sons, who's 22, was left in the house, along with the nine-month-old baby. My brother and cousin broke a window and pulled him out."

Torea said her brother and cousin were not able to reach the baby because of the intensity of the fire. "It was a really bad fire. The fire department got here quick, faster than I expected, but it was a really bad fire. It took them 40 minutes to put it out."

Torea and her family did everything they could to help the family in one of the worst fires she had ever seen. Torea's sister, Shekela Maxwell, 28, commented, "The kids who came running out the house didn't have any clothes on, but we were able to give them some things to keep warm with."

"A lot of people live in the lower flat," continued Shekela. "There is the mother who is in her 40s, six kids who are 22, 20, 18, 16, 12 and 7, and three

grandkids. The baby that died was a daughter's friend's child who was staying the night."

The mother of the deceased child has been identified by the media as Tiffany Perkins.

"The people in the upper flat, a mother who moved in about a week ago with her grandkid, got out safely."

Both Torea and Shekela commented on the deteriorated social conditions in the area. "It's really common for families to double up," said Torea. "The crime in the area is so high because people have no jobs and that's the only way they can survive. And then they make it really hard to find a job," she said.

According to the US Census Bureau, the number of households with multiple generations of a single family is growing as part of an effort to lower costs for all those involved. The Census Bureau notes that there were 5.1 million such households in 2010, up from 3.9 million in 2000.

A recent report has by the Skillman Foundation on conditions facing children in Detroit detailed the terrible social conditions facing working class families such as those involved in the fire last weekend.

The study, largely based on US Census data, revealed there was a 65 percent increase in child poverty in the former Motor City between 1999 and 2011. It also reported that 48 percent of 15- to 17-year-olds in Detroit were impoverished, 58.7 percent of 12- to 14-year-olds and 56 percent of 6- to 11-year-olds.

The report further revealed that 14.8 of every 1,000 infants born in Detroit die before their first birthday.

Detroit is the largest poor city in the US, with an official unemployment rate of 25 percent that researchers unofficially estimate to be as high as 50 percent.

On Detroit's east side, Shekela Maxwell talked about the changes in her neighborhood. "I've lived here all my life, for twenty-eight years. We used to have so many people and so many families around. It was a lot

of fun, especially in the summers when the kids would go out and play in the street.

“We know everyone around here. Within the past few years though, many people suddenly walked away from their houses because they couldn’t afford them,” she said, referring to the foreclosure crisis in Detroit. In 2009 as many as 75,000 homes were foreclosed in Detroit, as the sub-prime mortgage crisis virtually finished off neighborhoods already hard hit by unemployment.

Shekela told us, “Something has got to be done.”



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