

# Man charged in killing of 19-year old Detroit resident Renisha McBride

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26 November 2013

Renisha McBride, a 19-year-old African American woman and resident of Detroit, was shot and killed on the doorsteps of a suburban home in the early morning hours of November 2.

McBride had been involved in an auto accident and was apparently disoriented and seeking help. She was fatally shot in the face when Dearborn Heights resident Theodore Wafer fired a shotgun at her through the screen door.

The tragedy came during a week of multiple shootings in Detroit, including three triple homicides. Almost 300 city residents have been killed in homicides already this year. The social decay gripping Detroit, a product of decades of deindustrialization and a relentless assault on the working class, is one of the sharpest expressions of the poverty and chronic unemployment plaguing the United States.

Dearborn Heights is a small suburb that jags in and out of Detroit's west side, where the accident itself occurred. While his explanation has altered since the shooting, Wafer, 54, is now saying that he thought someone was breaking into his house, and that the gun was fired by accident. After first failing to bring charges, prosecutors have now charged Wafer with second-degree murder, manslaughter and death with a weapon with intent, but without malice.

One aspect of the case that has not been widely publicized was the failure of the police to respond to the auto accident. The police were called before 1 a.m., but the accident was considered a "low priority" and no one was sent to the scene.

Another call for help was placed 40 minutes later, but by the time police and the EMS arrived, the disoriented young woman had begun walking. A neighbor who saw Renisha said she was bloody and confused, said she "wanted to go home" and walked away.

The death of the unarmed teenager has caused justifiable outrage. However, before any details of the tragedy were even known—including the identity of the shooter—it was quickly seized on by a section of the Detroit political establishment to promote racial politics, to once again insist that the fundamental division in society—and, in particular, in Detroit—is between white and black, not between the working class and the corporate and financial elite.

Comparisons have quickly been made between the shooting of McBride and that of Trayvon Martin, the 17-year-old youth killed by George Zimmerman in Florida in 2012. There is an attempt to revive the type of campaign, involving many of the same political forces, that was generated around the death of Martin. (See, "The killing of Trayvon Martin and racial politics in America")

"This killing shows the reality that Black life is not valued in this country. The real narrative is about white supremacy," wrote the Voice of Detroit. Al Sharpton's National Action Network group in Detroit, closely tied to the Democratic Party, held a rally on November 9 claiming that Renisha was "another Trayvon." "We cannot allow the moment of Trayvon Martin to come and go," said Reverend Charles Williams II, Director of NAN in Detroit to the crowd at his church.

The story has been picked up by the national liberal and "left" media. The *Nation* writes, "Again, we mourn the death of a young black person killed, seemingly, for nothing more than being black." Joel Reinstein, writing for the International Socialist Organization's *Socialist Worker* added, "A 19-year-old African American woman is dead for the 'crime' of asking for help in a predominantly white suburb of Detroit."

Whether or not racial prejudice may have played a role in the killing of McBride is as yet undetermined. It

has, however, been discounted by many of the key players involved in the case. The McBride family lawyer, Gerald Thurswell, said the killing was an example of “human profiling” not “racial profiling.”

Renisha’s parents, who originally were swept up into the campaign promoted by the black nationalists, have released statements along similar lines as those of Thurswell. Even the prosecutor, Kym Worthy, who is African American, has indicated that there is no evidence at this time of racial profiling.

Even if race was involved in the killing of McBride, this must itself be related to the more fundamental social crisis in Detroit and the devastating consequences of the ruling class policy over the past four decades.

A section of the political establishment—including the Democratic Party establishment in Detroit and the various organizations that orbit around the Democratic Party—have very definite and vested interests in promoting the politics of racial identity. Such methods have long been used in Detroit and other cities to divide the working class and subordinate it to the political representatives of the corporate and financial elite.

The ISO’s Joel Reinstein, for example, denounces the statements from Worthy that the killing had “nothing whatsoever to do with the race of the parties.” Reinstein writes that, “no one who looks at the case can take that seriously.” He cites the comments of journalist Rania Khalek, who writes that Renisha was “a Black woman from Detroit, which is 82 percent Black, whereas Dearborn Heights, the area she was shot in, is 86 percent white.”

Reinstein and Khalek would have their readers to believe that Detroit’s suburbs are rich, white and racist, as opposed to Detroit, which is poor and black. Such stereotypes defy reality. In fact, poverty has increased 53 percent in suburban areas in the US, more than twice the rate of urban poverty. The suburban district where the shooting took place, Dearborn Heights, is undergoing a crisis that is similar to what has happened in Detroit, where stable neighborhoods and tree-lined streets once dominated.

Detroit, like Dearborn Heights and many suburban districts, is divided along class lines. There is a black elite in Detroit, including many who made a lot of money through official channels and affirmative action programs, as opposed to the working masses who are

bearing the brunt of the cuts to jobs and living standards.

It is notable that nowhere in the article by Reinstein and others is there a mention of the actual political situation in Detroit. The city is now being run by an African American emergency manager, Kevyn Orr, appointed by a white Governor, Rick Snyder. Both the outgoing mayor (David Bing, who is African American) and the incoming mayor (Mike Duggan, who is white) are collaborating with Orr, as is the predominantly African American City Council.

Detroit has been thrown into bankruptcy by Orr with the aim of using the courts, along with his own extraordinary powers, to slash wages, eliminate jobs, privatize city services and sell off assets—all in the interests of the corporate and financial elite. The whole process has received the explicit endorsement of the Democratic Party president, Barack Obama, who is African American.

The crisis in Detroit and in the country as a whole, in other words, is the greatest refutation of the continual insistence that the fundamental social division in America is racial in character. This only leads the upper middle class layer represented by the likes of the ISO and the NAN to redouble their efforts to use race to tie the working class to the Democratic Party.

Renisha, who worked as a temporary worker in light industrial facilities, was, above all, the victim of the social devastation inflicted upon Detroit by the ruling class. The attempt to exploit her death in the service of racial politics is a terrible disservice to her and all those suffering the effects of the social crisis in the Detroit Metropolitan Area.



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