Anger erupts after police killing of unarmed teen in St. Louis, Missouri

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The police killing of an unarmed 18-year-old youth in Ferguson, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis, has sparked mass outrage throughout the city and across the country. It is the latest in an epidemic of police murders in the US, including at least 18 people killed so far in the month of August.

The victim, Michael Brown, was on foot and en route to his grandmother's house when he was accosted and shot by police. Witnesses say he was first shot while trying to avoid an altercation. When Brown then placed his hands above his head and dropped to his knees, police fired into his head and chest multiple times.

Dorion Johnson, a friend of Brown's, says that the two were walking when a police officer confronted them, telling them to get off the street. After they continued walking, the police officer fired one shot. When they began to run away, "He shot again, and once my friend felt that shot, he turned around and put his hands in the air. He started to get down and the officer still approached with his weapon drawn and fired several more shots." (See video).

Brown's grandmother, Desuirea Harris, was waiting for her grandson at her home shortly after 2:00 p.m. After hearing noises from the street, she walked to the scene, where she found a stream of blood trailing away from her grandson's lifeless body, which was left on the street for four hours.

Hundreds of Ferguson residents—two-thirds of whom are African American, like the victim—gathered at the scene of the shooting Saturday as news of the killing spread. The anger of demonstrators was palpable, with some chanting "Kill the police."

Police responded with a display of overwhelming force. One hundred vehicles from 15 departments were dispatched to the scene. SWAT forces armed with assault rifles occupied strategic locations in the area and could be seen patrolling the streets. Police circled the area with at least one turreted armored military "MRAP" vehicle.

Attack dogs were also used for crowd control. Photos taken by witnesses show police walking dozens of snarling dogs toward protesters, who raised their hands above their heads and chanted, "please don't shoot me!"

Brown was less than a week away from his first day of courses at Vatterott College when he has killed.

The Ferguson Police Department placed Brown's killer on paid administrative leave. St. Louis Police Chief Jon Belmar attempted to defend the police actions on Sunday, while admitting that Brown was unarmed at the time of his death.

Belmar claimed that Brown got in an altercation with a police officer while in a squad car and attempted to reach for an officer's weapon. He said at least one shot was fired inside the car, and that Brown was then shot multiple times after exiting the vehicle. The police acknowledge that all casings found match those of the police officer.

What has taken place in Ferguson could be repeated in hundreds or thousands of towns and cities across the country. The police killing and the eruption of popular anger are a reflection of the extremely high degree of social tension in the United States.

Over the past three decades, there has been a dramatic increase in poverty in Ferguson and in the nearby towns of suburban St. Louis. In some of the areas surrounding Ferguson, poverty is as high as 40 percent. Unemployment and low-wage work predominate. The median household income in the district that borders the scene of the crime is only $14,390.

A report from the Missourians to End Poverty coalition released earlier this year shows that poverty in

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St. Louis itself increased from 27.2 percent in 2011 to 29.3 percent in 2014, amidst an intensifying assault on the working class throughout the country. Roughly one million Missourians are impoverished, out of a total population of just over 6 million.

In anticipation of social explosions, local police throughout the country are stockpiling weapons and armored vehicles used by US invasion forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. They are also mobilizing paramilitary SWAT teams for standard arrests.

In the wake of the killing, local Democratic Party politicians and affiliated organizations are being mobilized in an attempt to contain social opposition. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) has intervened to try to calm the situation, while casting the killing of Brown and police violence entirely in racial terms. In so doing, it hopes to conceal the underlying class issues bound up with the ruling class' protracted attack on the social rights and living conditions of the entire working class.

Central to the intervention of the NAACP is the defense of the Democratic Party and the Obama administration, which are no less culpable than the Republicans for the disastrous decline in working class living standards.

As part of an appeal to the Obama administration, the St. Louis chapter of the NAACP has called for the FBI to establish a presence in Ferguson.

Democratic State Representative Esther Haywood, the president of the local chapter of the NAACP, sought to place the St. Louis County Police Department in a favorable light. "I have spoken directly with St. Louis County Police Chief Jon Belmar, and I am confident that both he and his department will ensure that the investigation is conducted properly and that all details are kept transparent," she said.

Haywood discouraged protests, stating, "We strongly encourage residents to stay away from the crime scene so that no additional citizens are injured."

Since the start of 2014, at least 130 people have been killed by police in the United States. Amongst the victims are:

* Eric Garner, choked to death by police in New York City on July 17

* Misty Holt-Singh, a hostage in a bank robbery, shot and killed along with Gilbert Renteria and Alex Gregory Martinez in Stockton, California on July 16

* Carlos Mejia, shot holding a pair of gardening shears in Salinas, California on May 20

* Steven C. Cordery, shot while surrendering outside of his home in Spokane, Washington on March 26

* James Boyd, a homeless man camping outside of Albuquerque, New Mexico on March 11

* Luis Rodriguez, shot in Moore, Oklahoma after police responded to a fight between his wife and daughter on February 14

* Manuel Orosco Longoria, shot with his hands in the air in Phoenix, Arizona on January 14

Michael Brown is the latest victim to be added to this list. Along with the vast growth in the prison system, domestic spying and the militarization of American society, police violence is part of the repressive response of the ruling class to the growing social anger and opposition that is building up within the United States.

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