

The human rights disaster in America

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Antonio Zambrano-Montes, a 35-year-old Mexican national, was shot to death by police in Pasco, Washington last Tuesday as he was backing away from officers with his hands up. A video of the shooting clearly corroborates claims by Zambrano-Montes's family that he was killed "execution style."

Police claimed that Zambrano-Montes, who had lived in the city for ten years and worked as an orchard picker, may have been "armed with a rock" before he was shot multiple times. Protests erupted over the weekend, with more than a thousand demonstrating in Washington state on Saturday against the killing.

The United States has invaded, bombed and destabilized dozens of countries on the grounds that their regimes perpetrated human rights abuses. In his State of the Union address earlier this year, President Obama declared that America leads the world "with the example of our values." He added, "That's what makes us exceptional."

Not only is this sanctimonious drivel completely at odds with the reality of American imperialist foreign policy, which employs mass murder, support for extreme right forces, subversion and provocation as its stock-in-trade, it is belied by the reality of life within the United States itself.

The wave of police violence in the US is one aspect of an escalating assault on the democratic rights of the working class that makes a mockery of the official human rights rhetoric. Were these events occurring in a country targeted for conquest or regime change by the CIA and the Pentagon, that country would be declared a human rights disaster area.

According to a web site that keeps track of police shootings, Zambrano-Montes was the 122nd person to be killed by police in the United States since the start of the year. In the five days since the shooting, another ten people have been killed by police: two black, two white, one Latino. The names and identities of five

others have not been released.

In virtually all of these fatal police shootings, the victims have been blasted by a fusillade of bullets, their bodies riddled by ten, fifteen, twenty or more rounds fired off by the killer cops.

The recent incidents of wanton police violence include:

The beating of an elderly Indian man in Alabama as he walked in the street, leaving him partially paralyzed.

The beating of a 13-year-old schoolgirl by police in Baltimore, Maryland.

The killing of 17-year-old Jessica Hernandez as she sat in a car with her friends in Denver, Colorado.

The killing of Kristiana Coignard, a mentally disturbed teenager who was carrying a kitchen knife, in Longview, Texas.

Most of the killings and beatings that are widely known to the public have been captured on videotape, like the shooting of Zambrano-Montes. Countless similar incidents go unreported by the local and national media.

It is now six months since the August 9 police shooting of Ferguson, Missouri teenager Michael Brown, an act of wanton violence that sparked protests locally and nationally. The immediate reaction of the political establishment, from the local authorities to the Democratic governor to the Obama White House, was mass repression, including the declaration of a state of emergency and the deployment of the National Guard and militarized police with helicopters and armored vehicles to occupy Ferguson.

This was followed by a politically motivated decision not to indict Brown's killer, officer Darren Wilson, in a sham grand jury proceeding. Officer Daniel Pantaleo, who choked to death Staten Island resident Eric Garner in broad daylight, was likewise exonerated.

These rulings signaled a counteroffensive by the state to intimidate and criminalize opposition to police

violence and murder.

New York City, under the leadership of Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio, announced the formation of a special police unit armed with machine guns. The unit will be deployed for “dealing with events like our recent protests,” as New York Police Commissioner William Bratton put it. Across the country, scores of people have been arrested for posting anti-police comments on the Internet.

The wave of police beatings and killings is only one component of the escalation of state violence and the assault on democratic rights. Despite numerous “botched” executions, including the horrific state murder of Clayton Lockett in Oklahoma last April, in which the prisoner writhed in pain for an hour, America’s capital punishment assembly line continues to exact its toll, with eight people executed so far this year.

America’s vast prison gulag, which incarcerates the largest inmate population in the world, is increasingly assuming the social role of the debtors’ prisons of Dickensian England. Last week, the Vera Institute of Justice released a report documenting the extent to which American jails have become “massive warehouses” for the poor.

The organization found that more than half of the people in jail were incarcerated because they were unable to pay a bail of \$2,500 or less. It concluded that “a guilty plea may, paradoxically, be the fastest way to get out of jail.”

The brutality of the “justice” system in the US is only the most visible expression of the violent and exploitative character of American society. It embodies the response of the ruling class to ever-rising levels of social inequality, which have increased at an unprecedented rate over the six years of the Obama administration.

The corporate and financial elite, whose wealth has doubled since 2009, gorges itself at the expense of an increasingly impoverished working class. The state, headed by a military-intelligence-police apparatus that operates above the law, looks on the population with distrust, fear and hatred.

Killer cops shielded by the politicians and the courts, the militarization of the police, the criminalization of social protest—these are aspects of dictatorial forms of rule being put into place to defend the interests of the

financial aristocracy against the inevitable eruption of class struggle in America.



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