

# The police killing in Los Angeles

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On Sunday, in broad daylight and in full view of horrified bystanders, six police officers converged on a homeless, mentally unstable man living in a tent on Los Angeles's Skid Row, only a few blocks from downtown.

Ignoring the protests of shocked and outraged onlookers, the police proceeded to tase and beat the unarmed man. Three of the cops fired a total of five shots into their prostrate victim, killing him.

Like a number of similar police atrocities in the US in recent months, this event was taped by a witness. The four-minute video has circulated around the world, evoking in millions of people a combination of revulsion and disbelief. The wanton murder of a human being. Why? For what reason?

The killing of Charley Saturmin Robinet, known as "Africa," is only the latest in a string of police atrocities. Virtually every day, somewhere in "democratic" America, uniformed thugs wearing badges savagely beat or kill someone—almost always someone who is struggling to make ends meet in a society dominated by wealth and privilege.

Police killed 1,102 people last year. Nearly 200 more have died at the hands of police since the start of this year. The list of victims includes eighteen-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri; Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York; twelve-year-old Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio; sixteen-year-old Jessica Hernandez in Denver, Colorado; and Antonio Zambrano-Montes in Pasco, Washington.

In each case, the response of the local, state and federal governments has been the same—to shield the killer cops. Rigged grand juries refused to indict the officers who killed Michael Brown and Eric Garner, despite eyewitness accounts and even video evidence establishing that the victims were unarmed and posed no threat to their killers.

Obama administration officials have leaked to the

press the fact that the Justice Department will not bring federal charges against Darren Wilson, the Ferguson cop who murdered Michael Brown.

Last week, authorities in Cleveland argued in court that Tamir Rice bore responsibility for his own death at the hands of the police because he was playing with a toy pistol.

The net result of the string of police murders, which sparked nationwide protests, has been an unambiguous signal from the state that the police can beat and kill with impunity. Not a single cop has been prosecuted. On the other hand, hundreds of protesters have been arrested and dozens of people have been charged for criticizing the police in social network postings.

The brutality and violence of social relations in America found expression in another horrific and very public event this week. On Monday, for the second time in less than a week, the execution of a Georgia woman was postponed only hours before her lethal injection was scheduled to take place. Forty-six-year-old Kelly Renee Gissendaner was returned to death row to face yet another date with the executioner. This in a country whose Constitution bans "cruel and unusual punishment!"

The particular circumstances behind Sunday's killing of Robinet are indicative of the broader state of social relations in the US. Los Angeles's Skid Row is home to some 1,700 homeless people, many of them mentally ill, who have ended up in the street as a result of decades of budget cuts and chronic mass unemployment.

The police officers involved in the shooting are part of the "Safer Cities Initiative," a special unit formed for the purpose of cracking down on "quality of life" crimes, i.e., harassing and brutalizing the poor and destitute, as part of a drive to force the homeless out of an area targeted for gentrification.

The *New York Times* reported Tuesday that "an

explosion of downtown development and gentrification” has put “pressure on city officials to clean up the street.” As one Skid Row resident told the *Times*, “The cops don’t want us here. They tried to make an example out of [Robinet].”

These practices are mirrored in cities throughout the country. In Detroit, water and utility shutoffs are being used to drive out much of the city’s poor population, while a portion of the city center is transformed into an enclave for the wealthy.

The psychopathic actions of cops reflect the increasingly malignant and explosive social contradictions building up within the United States. The American ruling class, whose wealth and property the police and the state apparatus as a whole defend, looks on the working class with a combination of hatred and fear.

The Wall Street oligarchs and corporate CEOs are aware that their relentless attacks on working people and youth, compounded by their own insatiable greed, are leading inevitably to social upheavals. Their basic response is to crack down violently on every expression of social opposition and build up the infrastructure of a police state.

Hence the transformation of police forces across the country into domestic counterinsurgency paramilitaries. The working population within the country is looked upon in a similar manner as the people of Iraq and Afghanistan—as a hostile and potentially insurrectionary force.

More and more, the methods of foreign occupation are directly applied within the US. In Boston in 2013 and Ferguson in 2014, the police and military were used to lock down entire cities.

All of this has been promoted at the highest levels of government. The Obama administration has overseen the transfer of billions of dollars in military hardware to local police forces. It has defended the Defense Department’s program to arm local police with tanks, helicopters and military-grade weapons.

This is in line with the White House’s defense of the NSA domestic spying program, its assertion of the right to assassinate American citizens, and its shielding of those responsible for the Bush administration’s torture program.

Military-police repression within the United States is the outcome of endless war abroad and social

counterrevolution at home. It is the response of the ruling class to the staggering growth of social inequality.

War, inequality and dictatorship are the inevitable products of capitalism. The defense of democratic rights, including the right to live, is inseparable from the fight to overthrow this brutal, corrupt and obsolete social order, and establish a new, egalitarian form of social organization—socialism.



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