

Mass shooting in Kalamazoo, Michigan leaves six dead

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The United States woke up Sunday morning to news of yet another mass shooting, the 42nd of 2016, according to Mass Shooting Tracker. On Saturday night in Kalamazoo, Michigan, Jason Dalton, 45, shot eight people, killing six. The shootings occurred at three different sites.

The victims, who range in age from 14 to 74, were apparently chosen at random.

Dalton, a husband and father of two, had no criminal record or history of mental illness. He worked as an insurance adjuster, but also earned money driving for the ride-sharing company Uber. Investigators believe Dalton picked up and dropped off passengers in between the shooting rampage and was even looking for additional fares after killing the final victim of his nearly seven-hour shooting spree.

CNN affiliate WWMT interviewed a man who said he was a passenger in Dalton's car before the shootings started. "We got about a mile from my house, and he got a telephone call. After that call, he started driving erratically, running stop signs," Matt Mellen told the affiliate. "We were kind of driving through medians, driving through the lawn, speeding along and then finally, once he came to a stop, I jumped out of the car and ran away."

Mellen said he called the police, telling them, "He was surprisingly calm, I was freaking out."

The victim of the first shooting, according to Michigan State Police, was a woman shot several times at 5:42 p.m. in an apartment complex parking lot. The woman, who was with her three children, is in serious condition but is expected to survive, according to CNN.

More than four hours later, a 53-year-old man and his 17-year-old son were killed at a Kia car dealership as they were looking at a car. Shortly afterward, Dalton pulled into the parking lot of a Cracker Barrel

restaurant and opened fire on two vehicles, killing four others, ages 60 to 78, including a retired English teacher at Calhoun Community High School. A fifth victim, a 14-year-old in the passenger seat of one of the cars, is alive but in critical condition.

After two more hours, at approximately 12:40 a.m., police took Dalton into custody in downtown Kalamazoo without a conflict. Police described Dalton, who was carrying a semiautomatic handgun, as "even-tempered" at the time of the arrest.

Kalamazoo County Prosecutor Jeff Getting later told CNN, "These were very deliberate killings. This wasn't hurried in any way, shape or form. They're on video. We've watched the video with law enforcement. They were intentional, deliberate and—I don't want to say casually done—coldly done is what I want to say."

The "ride-sharing company" confirmed Dalton was an Uber driver and said he had passed a background check. "We are horrified and heartbroken at the senseless violence in Kalamazoo," Uber's chief security officer Joe Sullivan said to CNN in a statement. "We have reached out to the police to help with their investigation in any way that we can."

Officials have provided no motive for the killings, which they describe as "senseless" and "shocking." Local media referred to Dalton as an "average Joe." Politicians at the local, state and national level have commenced the hand-wringing that inevitably follows a mass shooting and have already made ritualistic calls for stricter gun control and better mental health care.

No one in the media or political establishment dares or is even capable of conducting an examination of American society that would shed light on the reason why the US leads the world in such mass killings. While it is often the most psychologically fragile who snap, the regularity of these shootings points to the

diseased character and dysfunction of American society as whole.

The political establishment, absorbed entirely with the enrichment of the financial and corporate elite, is impervious to the levels of social distress, which have worsened since the 2008 crash. The US has also been engaged in nearly two decades of endless wars that have coincided with the nonstop promotion of violence and the dehumanizing of the countless victims of American militarism. It is no surprise that such a poisoned atmosphere contributes to the outbreak of such violence in America.

Kalamazoo and the surrounding cities in southwestern Michigan have been hard hit by deindustrialization and deteriorating social conditions. Kalamazoo, which has a metro population of more than 300,000, had a poverty rate of 38.8 percent in 2011, putting it just below Flint (41.2 percent) and above Detroit (37.6 percent).

Between 1995 and 2010, the Kalamazoo area saw about half of its manufacturing jobs disappear, from more than 32,000 jobs to less than 18,000. A significant portion of these lost jobs were tied to the auto industry, which saw a brutal restructuring in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008. The General Motors Stamping plant in Kalamazoo, which once employed 4,000 workers, closed in 1999 and the 2.2 million-square-foot space is now occupied with largely low-paying light industrial, warehouse and retail jobs.

Three of the shooting victims lived in neighboring Battle Creek. In the home of Kellogg's and other cereal makers, 47 percent of the population, or 15,000 households, lack the means to pay for housing, child care, food and other basic necessities, according to a 2014 study on the working poor in Michigan.

West of Kalamazoo in Benton Harbor, the official poverty rate in the town of 10,000 residents is 48.8 percent and the median household income is only \$18,208, compared to \$48,411 for the state of Michigan as a whole. Appliance maker Whirlpool, which still has its headquarters in the town, has shut down virtually all of its manufacturing facilities. Many of the boarded up storefronts and ruined neighborhoods in the city, which was under the control of a state-appointed emergency manager from 2010 to 2013, look the same as they did in 2003 when two days of riots erupted over poverty and police violence.



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