

Notes on police violence

US police killings on track to reach all-time high in 2017

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As of this writing, the number of people killed by the police in the United States has likely increased. The count as of August 7, 2017 stands at 746 for the 2017 calendar year according to killedbypolice.net. Such an amount is unprecedented for the same time in previous years. If police killings stay consistent, 2017 will have the highest number of police killings on record.

While data from killedbypolice.net and the *Washington Post* is limited to recent years, both place 2015 as having the highest recorded number of people killed by police. Both, moreover, have recorded more killings than the official Federal Bureau of Investigation statistics (FBI), which has routinely undercounted killings.

As the *Post* has noted, “The FBI gathers information on fatal police shootings, but that program is based on voluntary reporting by police agencies and covers only cases in which police fatally shoot people who are committing felonies. The *Post*’s data has revealed a dramatic undercount by the FBI.”

According to killedbypolice.net:

? In 2014, police killed 663 people by August 7, with 1,114 killed by the year’s end.

? In 2015, police killed 725 by August 7, with 1,216 killed by the year’s end.

? In 2016, police killed 714 by August 7, with 1,162 by the year’s end. The *Washington Post*, owned by billionaire Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, recorded significantly lower deaths. Its data, nonetheless, also reveals a similar trend.

? In 2015, police killed 592 people by August 7, 2015, totaling 991 killed for the year.

? In 2016, police killed 589 people by August 7, 2016, totaling 963 killed for the year.

The *Post* puts the present tally, at 504, as of August 7 in 2017.

Both show that 2015 was the previous peak year for police killings, with a slight decline in 2016. Comparatively, the current count of police killings taken on August 7, 2017 is higher than any year at the same point in time from both killedbypolice.net and the *Post*. For 2017, the total number of killings averages to 3.5 a day. In just the first seven days of this month, from Tuesday, August 1 to Monday, August 7, US police killed at least 28 people, or four people every day.

Included amongst the dead is 32-year-old Kyle Andrew Lankford from Dickson County, Tennessee, shot by police on August 6. Police hounded Lanford in a police chase after he allegedly stole a car. Lanford was subsequently shot dead after he allegedly pulled out a knife after the pursuit ended. Last year, Lankford was arrested in Dickson County for the petty crimes of stealing, driving while drunk and on a revoked license, evading arrest and vandalism.

Then there is 15-year-old Kemonte Cobbs killed by Gary, Indiana police on August 2. Cobbs and four other individuals robbed a Verizon Wireless store in Munster, Indiana, 45 minutes southeast from Chicago, Illinois. The five individuals, including Cobbs, drove away from the store and were pursued by the police. Eventually, all five fled the vehicle, at which point Cobbs was shot dead for allegedly pointing a gun at a cop.

For the many thousands killed in an encounter with the police, most have had the misfortune of being born poor or becoming poor and destitute, forced into a life of desperation, violence, drug addiction, alcoholism,

crime, and suicide.

In Tennessee, where Andrew Lankford lived, a festering opioid epidemic took the lives of 1,451 people in 2015, up from 342 in 1999. Moreover, many of the state's residents live in poverty. In 2014, 18.4 percent of Tennessee's population scraped by below the official poverty line; many more live near poverty.

Gary, Indiana, where 15-year-old Kemonte Cobbs was killed, was a once major industrial hub which produced massive quantities of steel. Gary's massive steel plants employed many of the city's residents, providing them with relatively decent paying jobs.

Through decades of deindustrialization, much of Gary now sits as a boneyard of the steel industry. In 1970, the US Steel Gary Works employed over 30,000. In 1990 it declined to just 6,000. Presently US Steel Gary Works employs 5,100 workers. According to city-data.com, in 2015 38.6 percent of Gary residents lived below the poverty line. In 2013, the Gary Department of Redevelopment estimated that one third of all homes in the city are unoccupied or abandoned. The city's population has collapsed by more than 50 percent since its peak in 1960.

Police violence is inextricably bound up to with the astronomical growth of social inequality and intensification of class tensions. Today, eight people own more wealth than the bottom half of the world's population. In America, the wealthy live 15 years longer than the poor.

The enormous social chasm which exists in the United States is increasingly untenable and the American ruling class is taking note. With massive social upheavals on the horizon, it is seeking to defend its wealth, power and privileges by laying the framework for police-state rule.

The number of police officers working in the US has risen by a quarter of a million from three decades ago, according to the FBI. In 1975, there were 400,000 police officers throughout the US. Today, that number is more than 700,000.

According to a study entitled "OpenTheBooks Snapshot Report – The Militarization of Local Police Departments," 1.5 million military weapons, equipment and related items have been transferred from the Department of Defense (DoD) to federal, state and local law enforcement units since 2006.

The report found that "thousands of units of

government across America received military equipment" including "park districts, forest preserves, hometown police departments, junior colleges, universities, county sheriffs, natural resource and public safety departments, state police – and Homeland Security, Interior and the Justice Department."

The items amount to \$2.2 billion worth of gear and include "helicopters and airplanes, armored trucks and cars, tens of thousands of M16 and M14 rifles, thousands of bayonets, mine detectors and many other types of weaponry."



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