

# US police kill over a thousand for fourth year in a row

George Gallanis  
27 December 2017

For the fourth year in a row, police killed over a thousand people in the United States in one year. The four-year bloodbath is a stern warning to the working class in America and across the world. Social inequality is reaching unprecedented levels. Three billionaires own as much wealth as the bottom half of the population of the United States. The killings of thousands by police in the span of few years is an indication of the ruling elite's fear and hatred of the vast working class majority.

As of this writing, killedbypolice.net reports police killed 1,164 people in 2017. With a few days left in the year, the death count will likely increase, marking 2017 as second deadliest year since 2013, when the web site began tabulating the figures. Last year's count stands at 1,165.

Other police killing aggregators show similar totals. Mapping Police Violence places the count at 1,049. The *Washington Post*, which only tracks police shootings as opposed to other forms of police killings, by means of tasing, beatings and the like, places the count at 952 as of December 25.

Murder by police is effectively legal. Police officers can kill anyone, as long as they claim some kind of perceived threat, whether real or not. Hundreds, many of whom are unarmed, are murdered by officers who will never face a trial. According to Mapping Police Violence, in 2015, under the Obama presidency, 99 percent of all police killings did not result in any police officer being convicted of a crime by the so-called justice system. The capitalist state shoots and kills with one hand and washes the blood off with the other.

In November, released video footage showed an unarmed Daniel Shaver murdered by an Arizona police officer after begging for his life on his knees. The officer was acquitted of all charges after claiming he

feared for his life. In September, St. Louis police officer Jason Stockley was acquitted of murder for the 2011 killing of Anthony Lamar Smith. After shooting Smith six times from close range, Stockley planted a gun on Smith's dead body. Stockley's fingerprints were later found on the gun.

Following the verdict, protests erupted in St. Louis. St. Louis police responded, dressed in riot gear, illegally "kettling" protesters and arresting many all the while shouting, "Whose streets? Our streets!"

The protests were largely organized by Black Lives Matters (BLM) and pseudo-left groups such as the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and Socialist Alternative, who sought to portray the killing by Stockley as an act solely due to racism. Slogans such as "white silence is violence" were heard during the protests.

Three years earlier, in the aftermath of the killing of Michael Brown by Ferguson, Missouri police officer Darren Wilson, pseudo-left groups put forth the same narrative: the fundamental cause of police violence is racism. Often cited to bolster this argument is the fact that blacks are killed in disproportionately higher numbers compared to whites. According to the *Washington Post*, African-Americans comprised a quarter of all police killings in 2017. This clearly suggests that racism is an element in police killings, but these statistics only reveal part of the picture. The victims of police killings include all races and ethnicities. As any good doctor will point out, one must not confuse a symptom for the disease, and the disease is class oppression, claiming the poorest and most vulnerable sections of the working class.

The police, along with the state machine as a whole, exist as an instrument in the irreconcilable conflict between the ruling class and the working class. The

police are not neutral actors who can be pressured to act in a certain way. They serve the interests of the capitalist class, and carry out its orders. The thousands that lay dead at the hands of the police, regardless of skin color and gender, come almost entirely from the ranks of the working class. Police roam working class and poor neighborhoods hunting perpetrators of petty crimes. If you are stopped by the police, you are de facto guilty. If you fidget or do not follow a command directly, you may very well be shot and die. Whatever part racism plays in these murders, it is ultimately secondary to that of class.

American society is divided by massive inequality, intensified by decades of social counterrevolution. Social tension is palpable, with most working people increasingly angry and moving to the left. There is deep concern within the ruling class that social explosions of revolutionary dimensions are on the horizon. Preparing for such events, police more and more act as an occupying force, carrying the same weapons used overseas in occupied countries by the United States. In 1989, Congress passed the National Defense Authorization Act. It has made possible the transfer of \$5.4 billion worth of military gear to police departments across the United States. A report published by the US Department of Justice in 2015 states that local police departments swelled to 477,000 full-time personnel in 2013, a 35 percent increase since 1987. This three-decade period coincides with a drastic decline in crime, while the forces of “law and order” have been swelled and armed to the teeth.

History demonstrates the real role of the police. In 1937, for example, Chicago police shot and killed 10 striking workers during the Little Steel Strike. During the Detroit Rebellion of 1967, police were given order to ‘shoot to kill,’ claiming 16 victims. In some of the other social explosions of the mid- and late 1960s, the death toll at the hands of the police was even greater.

Under the Trump presidency, the police will operate more openly and ruthlessly. Police violence will grow, accompanied by increased attacks on democratic rights. Social and political opposition will be met with brutal violence, directed not only against individuals but also mass struggles.

The efforts of the proponents of identity politics to place the blame of police violence on racism effectively denies the role of the state and its class character. This

serves to create divisions within the working class along ethnic and racial lines. It leads to the counterproductive and reactionary conclusion that the police can be reformed by increasing the number of minority officers, or through such techniques as community policing, racial-sensitivity training and similar nostrums.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**