

Sandra Parks, 13-year-old Milwaukee, Wisconsin writer, killed in home by stray bullet

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On Monday, November 19, Sandra Parks, a 13-year-old Milwaukee, Wisconsin schoolgirl and writer, was shot and killed by an apparent stray bullet, one of four that entered her home and struck her while she was in her bedroom. Parks is the seventh Milwaukee Public School student killed this year via homicide, the twelfth child killed by firearms, and the 91st overall homicide in the Midwest state's largest city.

In what is now a standard response to every social crime or emergency that befalls workers under capitalism, a GoFundMe account has been set up by the family to help pay for exorbitant funeral costs.

Parks placed third in a school-wide district writing contest, held in honor of Martin Luther King Jr., two years ago this week. In her moving essay, titled, "Our Truth," Parks vividly described the social deterioration and trauma of daily life experienced by the youth and working class in the city.

"Sometimes, I sit back and I have to escape from what I see and hear every day. I put my headphones on and let the music take me away. I move to the beat and try to think about life and what everything means. When I do; I come to the same conclusion... we are in a state of chaos. In the city in which I live, I hear and see examples of chaos almost everyday. Little children are victims of senseless gun violence."

Following her death, Parks' words have resonated with workers, parents and children across the country who are searching for solutions to prevent this type of "senseless violence," which is pervasive throughout American society.

Six shell casings were recovered outside her family's north Milwaukee home. Two young men have been charged with reckless homicide in connection with the

killing, Isaac D. Barnes, 26, and Untrell Oden, 27. Milwaukee Police conducted house to house searches throughout the neighborhood with tactical officers donning body armor and carrying automatic rifles in search of the suspected shooters. Barnes and Oden were located a couple of blocks away from the shooting and surrendered without incident. Both had been arrested and incarcerated previously for various petty crimes, including armed robbery.

The response from representatives of the ruling class is the same ineffectual drivel that has produced a social catastrophe for the working class. Milwaukee's Democratic Mayor Tom Barrett, who has held the position since 2004, that is, a year before Sandra Parks was born, has overseen years of rising unemployment, poverty, and homeless rates. In a press conference held the following day, Barrett lamented the "insanity" of gun violence and once again called for "sensible gun control measures." Barnes and Oden, due to prior convictions, were already not permitted to own or possess firearms.

The now rote call for gun control will do nothing to address the underlying cause of social violence in the United States, primarily the capitalist system and the historic levels of social inequality it has produced. Throughout Sandra Parks' entire life, her neighborhood has been ground zero for social devastation overseen by the Democratic Party and their functionaries in the trade unions.

The ZIP Code Parks resided in, 53206, is often cited as the poorest zip code in Wisconsin, but this was not always the case. Beginning in the early 1980s, companies such as Allis-Chalmers, Delco, AC Spark Plug, Pabst, Louis Allis, Kearney & Trecker, Outboard

Marine and Marine Corporation (banking) left the area in search of cheaper labor to exploit and greater profits. Trade union bureaucrats in the United Auto Workers and United Steelworkers oversaw the elimination of jobs at the behest of stockholders and the suppression of the class struggle, all while maintaining their bloated salaries and coveted positions.

This hollowing out of the industrial urban center has led to rising poverty rates among all residents, regardless of race. In the latest supplement to the 2016 Wisconsin Poverty Report, which focused on Milwaukee, the Wisconsin Poverty Measure (WPM), which includes non-cash benefits such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) when determining poverty, exposes the high levels of poverty in Parks' neighborhood.

For a family of four in Wisconsin, the WPM poverty line was determined to be \$26,500, in Sandra's neighborhood, approximately 40.5 percent of black residents were at or below this line, compared to 32.5 percent of white residents. When narrowed to just children, the rate remains roughly the same for blacks, 39.0 percent, while the rate for white children in the same neighborhood increased to 65.3 percent, the highest in the state. This forced the authors of the report to conclude, "The concurrence of high black and white poverty in central Milwaukee suggests that place matters for all races, and that whites who live in poor places do as poorly as blacks."

The erosion of jobs and siphoning of wealth from working class communities to billion dollar companies and their shareholders has also had a devastating effect on Milwaukee's physical infrastructure. Similar to Flint, and thousands of other American cities, clean water is now a luxury throughout the city, as the share of children exposed to lead poisoning has continued to increase. As reported in March of this year by CBS, 11.6 percent of Milwaukee children, over three times the national average, were found to have contracted lead poisoning.

While Mayor Barrett sought to blame lead-based paint, which is still in over 100,000 Milwaukee homes, for the poisoning of thousands of children, Milwaukee continues to use over 74,125 lead-based service pipes to deliver water to residents. Lead pipes have been banned by Congress since 1986, yet less than one percent have been replaced, as inadequate funding has

stymied the process of removing the city's dangerous pipes.

Instead of providing the necessary funding to ensure everyone has access to clean water, Barrett, like hundreds of other mayors, spent this past summer trying to entice the richest man on the planet, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, to come to the city and exploit workers. Barrett stated he would "love to work" with Bezos and advised the centibillionaire to build a distribution center on the city's north side to take advantage of the "high unemployment rate," in the area.

This is what the capitalists and their political representatives have to offer the working class: poisoned water, low-wage labor, if any, and "senseless violence," which they are unwilling to address beyond increased police repression and empty platitudes.



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