

“Police violence is endemic to the system”

Pittsburgh high school students protest acquittal of killer cop

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26 March 2019

Hundreds of high school students and others took part in a noontime rally in downtown Pittsburgh on Monday, in the fourth day of protests following the acquittal of the police officer who shot and killed 17-year-old Antwon Rose, Jr. on June 18, 2018 in the suburb of East Pittsburgh.

Former East Pittsburgh Police officer Michael Rosfeld was found not guilty of a single charge of criminal homicide Friday after a four-day trial. Rosfeld shot Rose three times in the back during a traffic stop. Rose was unarmed and running away when he was killed.

“I don’t see why he had to shoot him,” Tina, a high school student from Obama High School in Pittsburgh’s East Liberty neighborhood, told the WSWS. “He was running away, he did not pose a threat. He had a whole life to live.”

Rosfeld justified the shooting by claiming that he feared for his safety and the safety of the community. The claim of an officer fearing for his or her safety has become the standard defense in every police killing. The added line about safety of the community allowed Rosfeld to justify the murder even though Rose was unarmed and running away.

Joel, a student from Allderdice High School in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood, said that he was protesting Monday because he felt it was important to stand up to police brutality. “Literally, I wouldn’t be here if someone didn’t stand up to the police.”

Joel explained that his great-grandfather was arrested during the Nazi attack on Jews in November 1938 known as Kristallnacht. “His wife and mother broke into a Nazi office that night and forged a document ordering his release the next day,” he said.

“If people didn’t stand up for my great-grandfather, I wouldn’t be here today. I’m not saying this is the same as thing, but I think people have to stand up to police brutality.”

Monday marked the fourth day sustained of protests. Friday night, following the announcement of the verdict, hundreds of people marched through the East Liberty neighborhood, blocking intersections and going into restaurants, hotels and other businesses to voice their outrage to the verdict.

On Saturday, several hundred people gathered at Freedom Corner in the Hill District. The intersection acquired that name because it was the location of civil rights protests in the 1950s and 1960s. Following the rally, participants marched up to the Oakland neighborhood where they were joined by hundreds of University of Pittsburgh students.

A vigil was held on Sunday in the borough of Rankin where Rose had lived. His mother spoke at the vigil and called upon people to continue protesting for changes to the laws which favor the police. Referring to the continued number of people being killed by police, she said “this is not just about an individual.”

At Monday’s rally, students chanted “17” when asked how old Rose was when he was killed and called for the removal of Allegheny County District Attorney Stephen A. Zappala, who was responsible for trying the case.

“This is not right, we should stand up to the police when they do bad things,” said Lee, a student from Allderdice High School. “I’m here because police violence is endemic to the system, especially against black men, and it is time to end it.”

Monday’s protest was organized on social media and

busloads of students left their schools around 11 a.m. to go downtown and take part in the march.

“We came here today because we wanted to show support for Antwon and also for ourselves,” Tina explained. “Today, these shootings are very common and it is a struggle for black people, and not just black people but everyone.

“Everyone has to come together to stop police brutality. It is not good, for all the things that are happening in the world today. This has been going on for years and years and it has got to stop.”

Tina’s friend Leona was very upset with the acquittal of Rosfeld. “The verdict on Friday was clearly wrong. Three shots in the back is not justified at all. We are here to support Antwon, Antwon’s family,” she said.

“The police are supposed to be our protection, but it feels like we need protection from them.”

According to killedbypolice.net, a database that tracks all reported police killings, there have been 221 people killed as of March 22 of this year. There were 1,166 people killed by the police in 2018, up from 1,147 in 2017. Despite the total number of killings exceeding 1,000 for year after year, charges are rarely brought against killer cops. The trial of Rosfeld is the exception that proves the rule.

While African-American males are disproportionately the victims of police killings, the largest number of victims are white. Police across the US continue to gun down people of every skin color, ethnicity and gender, what these victims all have in common is that they are overwhelmingly poor and working class.



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