

Protest erupts in Memphis, Tennessee after US marshals kill 20-year-old Brandon Webber

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The shooting death of a young African-American man at the hands of a US Marshals Service task force in Memphis, Tennessee Wednesday evening produced a quick and angry response by residents of one of the poorest neighborhoods in one of the poorest cities in the state.

Brandon Webber, 20, was shot and killed by the still unidentified federal agents at around 7 p.m. Wednesday night in Memphis's Frayser neighborhood, a poor, working-class district about five miles north of downtown.

The killing prompted about 100 protesters to take to the streets to vent their anger and demand justice. Memphis Police were mobilized to cordon off the scene when the neighborhood protest began and were not involved in the shooting, a police spokesperson told the media.

The outpouring of anger at police over the latest police killing was likely primed by the announcement Tuesday that a Memphis officer who shot and killed unarmed Terrance Carlton in April of last year would face no criminal charges. Police body camera footage showed that Carlton, 25, was unarmed and lying on the ground on his side when he was shot twice in the abdomen.

Some protestors later in the evening dismantled a concrete wall and hurled chunks of concrete and stone at police who turned out in riot gear, weapons and riot shields. More than a dozen police vehicles were severely damaged.

Local media reported that 36 police officers and two news reporters were injured in the fray but none seriously. There was no reporting on the number of Frayser residents who might have been injured when they were confronted by the police who fired tear gas into the crowd of protestors.

By the end of the evening the police arrested just three

people, charging them all with disorderly conduct and one with inciting a riot.

Webber was shot multiple times after he allegedly rammed his car into vehicles used by the Gulf Coast Regional Fugitive Task Force. According to the Task Force officers he allegedly got out of the car with a weapon and was shot.

The federal agents were at Webber's home to serve what was described by the media as "several felony warrants" at the time of the shooting.

While there were videos posted on social media of protesters' confrontations with police, none has emerged of the shooting itself since US marshals and other federal agents are not required to use either car dash cameras or body cameras.

Demetrick Skinner, Webber's cousin, along with Shelby County Commissioner Tami Sawyer each told the *Daily Memphian* that Webber was shot up to 20 times before dying in his family's front yard, according to the newspaper.

Other questions have been raised about the killing. "What's not mentioned is the conflicting reports...eye witness accounts allege that he was shot after he was cuffed and subdued already, thus the riot," Andrew Williams wrote on Twitter. "They shot him 20 times when he was in cuffs," Ryan Irving also tweeted. "He had a bright future ahead of him and ya'll took that away from him."

With no eyewitness or police body camera videos, details of the shooting have disappeared into the black hole known as the Tennessee Bureau of Investigations (TBI) which can take weeks if not months before releasing information.

While the Frayser neighborhood is known for Academy Award-winning hip-hop artist Cedric Coleman, known as

Frayser Boy, it is also recognized as perhaps the poorest area in one of the poorest cities for its size in the nation. According to city-data.com, the poverty rate in Frayser is 44.8 percent compared to Memphis as a whole at 26.9 percent.

Median household income in 2016 for Frayser was just \$31,065, compared to the entire city which was \$38,826; both well below the median income of Nashville, the state capital, with almost \$64,000.

Factories in the area which once employed thousands began to close one after the other in the 1970s and 1980s causing many working-class residents to leave the area and severely limiting opportunities for those who remained behind. Those who live in the area face environmental hazards and contamination from industrial runoff and toxic waste which remains at the sites of abandoned factories.

As far back as 1983 in the *Public Health Policy Journal* article “Toxic Waste Uproar: A Community History,” Jeffrey S. Harris placed Memphis and the Frayser district in particular in the same category as Three Mile Island, the Pennsylvania nuclear plant that experienced a dangerous partial meltdown in 1979, and the Niagara Falls, New York’s Love Canal which became the cause of a massive environmental pollution disaster harming the health of hundreds of residents and requiring an extensive Superfund cleanup.

Webber, a father of three, had graduated from Central High School in 2017. His former principal, Greg McCullough, said in a statement to the media that the young man’s death has left him broken-hearted.

McCullough described Webber as a student who excelled at art and worked hard in school. “My heart is broken over the news regarding the death of Brandon Webber. Brandon worked hard during his time at Central... I remember that he was a very talented art student. He seemed to really love his experience at Central High and he engaged well with others. My prayers go out to the Webber family during this devastating time.”



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