

Three dead in Gilroy, California festival shooting

Gunman motivated by white supremacist ideology

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Early Sunday evening, the annual Garlic Festival in Gilroy, California became the scene of the latest mass shooting in the US. Just after 5:30 p.m., festivalgoers and vendors heard popping sounds, which some initially mistook for firecrackers. Soon they realized that the sounds came from an assault rifle being fired indiscriminately.

Videos from the scene show people running for their lives, not knowing where to go for safety. Witnesses reported seeing a young man wearing a camouflage uniform and hat with a long rifle with removable ammunition magazines. The first 911 calls came in at 5:41 p.m., and within a minute three Gilroy police officers had engaged the shooter, fatally wounding him with pistol shots.

Gilroy Police Chief Scot Smithlee said the gunman had appeared to access the festival grounds via a creek and cut through a perimeter fence with some sort of tool, bypassing metal detectors at the event entrance. The three fatalities included a six-year-old boy, a 13-year-old girl and a 25-year-old man. At least a dozen others were wounded, some remaining in critical condition in area hospitals as of Monday evening.

Gilroy is a largely agricultural community of about 50,000, some 80 miles southeast of San Francisco. The working-class city is integrated, with about equal numbers of Latinos and whites. Known as the Garlic Capital of the World, Gilroy prides itself on its annual Garlic Festival, which attracts tens of thousands of people. As in the case with similar mass shootings, those setting out on Sunday to enjoy the day at the festival could not know that it would end in such horror.

Authorities have identified the shooter as 19-year-old Santino William Legan. They say his weapon was an AK-47-type assault rifle he had apparently purchased

legally in Nevada on July 9. Although police were quick to characterize the shooting rampage as “random,” upon closer examination it fits the pattern of similar bloody outbursts over the last few years.

It appears that the young gunman scoped out the event for attack. In an Instagram account bearing the suspect’s name created five days ago, one post was a photo of people walking around the Garlic Festival.

Another showed a sign of Smokey Bear saying, “Fire Danger High Today.” The caption read: “Read *Might is Right* by Ragnar Redbeard,” adding, “Why overcrowd towns and pave more open space to make room for hordes of mestizos and Silicon Valley white twats?” A “mestizo” is a person of mixed descent, usually white and Hispanic, or white and American Indian. The term was used in the *casta* system during the Spanish Empire’s control of colonies in the Americas and Asia.

The racist overtones are clear. But even more ominously, the book reference is to *Might is Right* or *The Survival of the Fittest*, a social Darwinist, white supremacist screed first published in 1890. The book’s author drew his inspiration from—among others—German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who championed nihilistic, anti-Enlightenment views, including a theory of master-slave morality. Nietzsche’s work became associated with fascism and Nazism.

One passage in *Might is Right* reads: “The Declaration of Independence commences by proclaiming an unctuous falsehood, a black, degrading, self-evident lie—a lie which no one could possibly believe but a born fool. With insolent effrontery it brazenly proclaims as ‘a self-evident truth’ that ‘all men are created equal.’”

And further: “You have only to look at some men, to know that they belong to an inferior breed. Take the Negro for example. ... Similar language may be applied to

the Chinaman, the Coolie, the *Kanaka*, the Jew, and to the rotten-boned, degenerates of Anglo-Saxonism, rich and poor. Vile indeed are inhabitants of those noxious cattle *kraals*: London, Liverpool, New York, Chicago, New Orleans” (emphasis added—*Kanaka* refers to a Pacific Islander enslaved as an indentured servant in Australia; *kraal* is an Afrikaans word for an enclosure for livestock within an African village).

Changing the specific references, one could easily swap out “those noxious cattle kraals: London, Liverpool, New York, Chicago, New Orleans” with Donald Trump’s recent tweets about Rep. Elijah Cummings’ congressional district in Baltimore, which the president derided as a “rat and rodent infested mess,” a “disgusting & filthy place.” He stated, “No human being would want to live there.”

Trump’s racist tirades against Cummings and the city of Baltimore followed on the heels of his attacks on four Democratic congresswomen two weeks ago, in which he wrote that they should “go back” to the “crime infested places from which they came.”

When he speaks these foul obscenities, Trump is appealing to elements like the Gilroy shooter. This is not just verbal jousting but is part of a calculated effort to base his reelection campaign on the incitement of an openly fascistic movement.

An examination of two of the most heinous mass shootings in the past year points to the type of forces Trump and his fascistic advisers seek to rally, both in the US and internationally:

- The Pittsburgh synagogue shooting on October 27, 2018, in which 11 were killed, and seven injured. Shooter Robert Bowers, an anti-Semite and neo-Nazi, sympathized with the Trump administration’s persecution of immigrants, but regarded them as insufficient. He wrote in one post: “There is no #MAGA [Make America Great Again] as long as there is a k**e infestation.”

- The mosque shootings in Christchurch, New Zealand, on March 15, 2019, in which 51 were killed, and 49 injured. The shooter, self-described white supremacist Brenton Tarrant, wrote a 74-page manifesto titled “The Great Replacement”—a reference to “white genocide” theories—calling for all non-European immigrants, whom he claimed to be “invading his land,” to be removed. He praised Trump as “a symbol of renewed white identity and common purpose.”

Trump’s fascistic entreaties—and in these he is joined by his counterparts in Europe and elsewhere—are combined with a vicious attack on immigrants from Central America fleeing poverty and violence, whom he brands as

“invaders,” “rapists” and “criminals.” The term “concentration camps” is an accurate description of the cages in which men, women, children and infants are held without access to proper food, clothing, sanitation and medical care.

It is 20 years since the horrifying massacre at Columbine High School in Colorado, when on April 20, 1999, students Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold walked into the school armed with assault rifles and pipe bombs, killing 12 students and one teacher before turning the guns on themselves.

The WSWS wrote at the time of the indices of social and political dysfunction that produce such events: “Vital indicators of impending disaster might include: growing polarization between wealth and poverty; atomization of working people and the suppression of their class identity; the glorification of militarism and war; the absence of serious social commentary and political debate; the debased state of popular culture; the worship of the stock exchange; the unrestrained celebration of individual success and personal wealth; the denigration of the ideals of social progress and equality.”

There is little need for correction to these words, only their amplification. The ensuing years have seen both a burgeoning of social inequality and an increased drive to war. Two-and-a-half years after Columbine, on September 11, 2001, the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were hit by a terrorist attack, killing nearly 3,000 and injuring twice that many.

The US government has never explained how men under surveillance by the FBI were able to carry out the attack. The George W. Bush administration seized on 9/11 to inaugurate the “war on terror,” which was the basis for taking the US into war first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq, laying waste to these countries and resulting in countless deaths and millions of global refugees—all on the basis of lies.

The fascistic rantings of Donald Trump are the logical expression and extension of these policies of the US ruling elite. The mass shootings such as Sunday’s in Gilroy are a warning of the necessity of the working class to arm itself politically against this threat.



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