

Five years after police murder of Michael Brown

Police have killed 5,000 Americans since Ferguson protests

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Friday marked five years since 18-year-old Michael Brown was shot at least six times, including once through the top of the head, and left for four-and-a-half hours to die in the street by Ferguson, Missouri police officer Darren Wilson. Brown's father, Michael Brown, Sr. used the grim anniversary to call for a reopening of the investigation into his son's death. The killer cop has never been charged.

"Justice has not been served," Brown, Sr. said at a press conference Friday morning outside the St. Louis County Justice Services Center, not far from where Michael Brown was killed. "My son deserved to live a full life. But a coward with a badge... chose not to value his life. My son was murdered in cold blood, with no remorse and no medical treatment."

Brown's killing on the afternoon of August 9, 2014 sparked popular protests in the small working class suburb of St. Louis, which were met with a paramilitary police occupation and deployment of the National Guard by a Democratic governor. The scenes of riot police with body armor and military grade weapons, backed by armored vehicles with mounted machine guns and military helicopters, facing down peacefully protesting men, women and children shocked the whole country and the world. Protestors were shot by rubber bullets, bean bags and flash bang grenades. More than a dozen journalists were arrested as they attempted to cover the police crackdown.

Despite volleys of tear gas and the imposition of a curfew, protests continued night after night, demanding that Wilson be charged and arrested for the murder of the African American teenager.

Four months later a grand jury delivered its decision not to indict Wilson, reigniting protests that were again

met by a police crackdown and the deployment of more than a thousand National Guard troops. This was followed by President Barack Obama's Justice Department announcement in March 2015 that it would not bring federal civil rights charges against Wilson, completing the whitewash of Brown's murder.

The killing of Brown, along with the police murder of Eric Garner, choked to death less than a month earlier on Staten Island in New York City, sparked a nationwide wave of protests demanding an end to police violence. The popular slogans "Hands Up! Don't Shoot!" and "I Can't Breathe!" were taken up by crowds across the country protesting one police killing after another.

Despite popular protests and increased scrutiny in the aftermath of Brown's killing, US police officers have continued to kill at a rate of more than 1,000 people every year, amounting to more than 5,000 since Brown was gunned down. According to data collected by Mapping Police Violence, police officers were charged in less than 2 percent of all 6,836 killings recorded between 2013 and 2018. In only 0.4 percent of cases (28) during this period was an officer charged, convicted and sentenced.

Police murders that have provoked significant protests since Brown's death include:

- The murder of twelve-year-old Tamir Rice (December 2014): Rice was shot within two seconds of police arriving at the park gazebo in Cleveland, Ohio where he was playing with a toy handgun. He died the following day in the hospital. Neither officer involved in the shooting was ever charged.
- The death of Freddie Gray (April 2015): Gray died after being given a "rough ride" in the back of a

Baltimore police van. His killing sparked a social eruption that was suppressed by 2,000 National Guard soldiers. While six officers were charged in his death, none was convicted.

- The shooting death of Philando Castile (July 2016): Castile, 32, was shot and killed during a traffic stop in suburban Minneapolis, Minnesota. His murder was live-streamed on social media by his girlfriend to the horror of millions. The officer, Jeronimo Yanez, was charged with second degree manslaughter but found not guilty at trial.

- Little more than a year later, on July 15, 2017, a Minneapolis police officer shot and killed 40-year-old Justine Damond in the alley behind her home. Officer Mohammed Noor, who had fired his gun from the passenger seat of the squad car his partner was driving, was found guilty of third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter and sentenced in April to 12.5 years in prison.

- Stephon Clark was shot at least seven times, including multiple shots in the side and back, in his grandmother's backyard by two Sacramento, California police officers on March 18, 2018. While Clark was holding only a cell phone, the district attorney declined to bring charges and determined that the officers were justified in using deadly force.

The reign of terror has continued this year with at least 544 people shot and killed by police, according to the latest tally by the *Washington Post*. Under Trump, the police operate without even the fig leaf of federal oversight provided by the Justice Department under Obama. Trump has counseled the police not to be “too nice” when arresting people.

The Black Lives Matter organization and slogan were promoted in the aftermath of the Brown killing to corral opposition behind the Democratic Party and divide the working class by promoting identity politics. With the backing of the corporate media and the Obama administration, Black Lives Matter was championed in order to present police killings as essentially a racial issue, obscuring the more fundamental class issues. The illusion was promoted that police brutality can be resolved by means of various reforms, including more minority officers, racial sensitivity training, body cameras, “community oversight” and federal consent decrees.

Having won positions of privilege and influence,

including \$100 million from the Ford Foundation, the leaders of Black Lives Matter have since worked to keep popular protests under wraps, seeking to prevent another popular uprising like Ferguson or Baltimore while advancing the agenda of black capitalism.

While African American men and boys have been the focus of many national protests and are disproportionately the victims of police violence, the largest number of victims continue to be white. What unites all of those who are killed or wounded by the police is that they are working class or poor and among the most vulnerable elements in society, including the homeless and those suffering from mental illness.

Since the urban rebellions of the 1960s, police forces across the US have been militarized, with the establishment of SWAT teams and the deployment of armored vehicles to crush any sign of opposition from the working class. Under Obama, record amounts of weapons and equipment were doled out to local police forces by the Pentagon under its so-called 1033 program, which was established by another Democrat, President Bill Clinton.

The fundamental cause of endless police violence is the capitalist system, which the police operate to protect and serve, along with all of the dire conditions it produces for the working class—poverty, social inequality and war. Police killings can be fought only through the unification of the working class in the US and internationally, across all artificial racial, ethnic and national lines, in the fight for a socialist society based on human need and not the profit interests of a rapacious ruling elite, which controls the entire political system and both big business parties.



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