

# Seventeen-year-old gunned down by police in Lonoke County, Arkansas

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Protesters gathered outside the Lonoke County Sheriff's Office last Wednesday in Lonoke, Arkansas, consisting of friends and family of 17-year-old Hunter Brittain, who was gunned down by police during a traffic stop early that morning.

According to members of Brittain's family, he was working on his truck at around 3 am local time, trying to repair it so that he could make it to his job at Hundley Construction by 6 am. Scott Hundley, owner of Hundley Construction, said Brittain had worked for him on and off over the past few years.

Brittain was dealing with vehicle problems but kept in frequent contact with Hundley regarding the issue. Hundley said he spoke with Hunter at about 7 pm the night before his death. "I was checking with him on his truck," Hundley said. "[He was] sending me pictures of his truck at the shop. He says he's been working on this truck but he's trying to make it."

Brittain's grandmother, Rebecca Payne, was present at the protest. "He was my grandson," she said. "I'm his grandmother. I've had him for the last five years of his life. We're ready to find out something. It's time they start letting us know something."

On Thursday, protesters in pick-up trucks did burnouts in the parking lot of the sheriff's office. One protester spray-painted the words "Justice for Hunter" on the building.

Harley Brittain, Hunter's uncle, pointed out, "This is happening all across the country, and this is happening too close to home for us. If he [the sheriff's deputy] felt like he was in danger, he's got a taser on his hip. He didn't reach for that. He reached for his gun and shot a 17-year-old boy in cold blood, in his throat."

Jordan King, Brittain's 16-year-old friend and an eyewitness, said he and Brittain had worked through the night to change the transmission on Brittain's truck

after having driven approximately one mile down the road to Mahoney's Body Shop to make the repairs.

After the repairs had been made, the two boys drove out of the auto shop, whereupon Sergeant Michael Davis pulled them over on Arkansas 89. King said Brittain's truck would not go into park, prompting Brittain to exit the vehicle and reach for a blue oil jug in the truck bed to put behind the vehicle so as to prevent the truck from rolling into Davis' squad car.

According to King, Davis, without issuing any commands, immediately drew his weapon and fatally shot Brittain. "They didn't say one word that I know of," King said. "I didn't hear it and it happened so fast."

King explained that a second police officer arrived at the scene and detained him. "[The officer] told me get out with my hands up and pull my shirt up and stuff, and then [forced] me to the ground, put me in handcuffs and was dragging me around and stuff. I sat in the back of the cop car for about three hours."

King was later interviewed by the Arkansas State Police regarding what had occurred. He mentioned his confusion as to why the deputy would shoot Brittain when he brandished no weapon and did not appear threatening. He said that when he saw the lifeless body of his friend lying face down on the ground, it did not appear real to him.

Lonoke County Sheriff John Staley released a video on Facebook Wednesday in which he states that he had provided state police with body camera footage of the shooting. Claiming that he handed over the video without having viewed it, he adds that while everyone wants the truth, he *isn't sure how much of the incident was captured on camera*. [emphasis added.]

In the video, Staley went on to say, "Sadly, on social media, some people are demanding I take action

without waiting for evidence. That's irresponsible, and I won't do it. There's a lot of misinformation on social media. Don't believe it. Let's all wait until the facts are confirmed."

This admonishment angered those protesting Brittain's murder.

This tragedy has gone unreported in the *New York Times*, the principal media voice of the Democratic Party, *Jacobin* magazine, which is linked to the Democratic Socialists of America, and *Liberation News*, the online newspaper of the Party for Socialism and Liberation. Deaths of white people as a result of police violence, such as Brittain, are largely swept under the rug because they cut across the racist narrative promoted by the Democratic Party and the pseudo-left.

From 2017 to the present, according to Statista.com, victims of fatal police shootings in the US total 4379, of whom 1,805 are identified as white, 989 as black, 692 as Hispanic, 150 as "other," and 753 as unidentified. So far this year, police have killed a total of 371 people, including 122 whites, 71 blacks, 38 Hispanics, 3 listed as "other," and 137 unidentified.

The overwhelming majority of these victims are working class. This conforms to the pattern of police killings worldwide. The vast majority of those who are brutalized, "disappeared" or killed by the armed and uniformed enforcers of the capitalist state are from the working class.

The police cannot be reformed within the framework of capitalism. They are generally recruited from among the more backward social elements in keeping the function they perform on behalf of the ruling corporate-financial elite. This is what determines the prevalence of right-wing and racist views within police departments, as well as the fact that minorities, disproportionately among the most impoverished sections of the working class, are disproportionately among their victims.

Biden and the Democrats, including their pseudo-left appendages, portray police violence entirely as an expression of white racism, in order to foment divisions within the working class and undermine the growth of working class resistance and class consciousness. Meanwhile, they reject any policies in response to the pandemic, based on science, that impinge on the profit interests of the corporate-financial oligarchy,

sacrificing the lives mainly of workers to the economic interests of Wall Street. This is what drives the deadly campaign to eliminate all pandemic restrictions and force workers back into unsafe workplaces and schools.

With working class resistance growing, the Democrats and Biden are now diverting hundreds of millions of dollars in pandemic relief funds into the hiring of more police.



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