

Twelve-year-old boy killed by Philadelphia police

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Philadelphia, Pennsylvania police shot and killed 12-year-old Thomas Siderio on Tuesday evening. Siderio was shot in the back by two plainclothes police officers as he ran from their unmarked police car.

According to accounts of witnesses, Siderio, who was white, along with an unidentified friend, were on their way to a nearby park Tuesday evening to hang out on one of the first warm evenings of the new year.

As they neared the corner of 18th and Barbara Street, unbeknownst to them, four plainclothes police officers were sitting in an unmarked car at the corner.

Police make the almost unbelievable claim that a shot was fired into their car, missing all four men, and that as officers exited the car they saw Siderio holding a gun and started firing at him. As Siderio ran, two officers chased him and one shot and killed him.

At a Wednesday news briefing, Deputy Commissioner Benjamin Naish, who oversees investigations, said that authorities cannot definitively say the boy fired a shot.

In justifying shooting the 12-year-old in the back, Naish told reporters that the fact that he was fleeing "doesn't mean that he wasn't continuing to be a threat to the officers."

Siderio was killed a block from where the unmarked car was parked. None of the officers were wearing body cameras at the time of the shooting, which could corroborate the official story.

Police say they fired two shots at Siderio, one striking him in the back and killing him.

Residents on the block and witnesses say they heard police firing seven or eight shots at Siderio and the 17-year-old friend of his who was also running from the plainclothes officers.

Maureen Flocco, a resident, told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* that she heard seven or eight loud popping noises. After the shooting stopped, she looked out and "that's when I seen the kid laying on the ground."

"I'll never get that kid's face out of my head," she told reporters while sitting on her front stoop.

Photos of bullet holes in parked cars show at least five

shots having been fired.

No evidence has been presented that the police ever identified themselves to the boy or ordered him to stop before they opened fire. It is quite possible that the police shot their own car and planted the gun on Siderio after the fact.

Even taking the police account to be true that their car was hit by a bullet, the boys standing nearby seeing the response by four people in regular clothes would have rightly thought there was going to be a gun fight and were just running to protect themselves.

Philadelphia has seen a recent spike in gun violence. This past year, scores of teenagers have been gunned down in low income and poor neighborhoods—several during the day as they were on their way home from school.

Further undermining the police claim that Siderio was the shooter, the 17-year-old friend of Thomas was not arrested, an unlikely event if he participated in an ambush of police officers.

A friend of Siderio said that he briefly met up with the boy and his friend shortly before the police shooting. He told investigators that he told the two that he was on his way to work and the two boys told them they were headed to the park to "hang out."

Santo Primerano, 20, told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* that he knew Siderio from the neighborhood, "I didn't even make it to Center City when I got the call."

Primerano said Siderio, who went by T.J., had a turbulent childhood but "always tried to put a smile on everybody's face."

"He is a good kid, always laughing, joking around," he said.

In what could certainly be described as an attempt to cover up their crime, home surveillance video which residents activated immediately after the shooting, shows a police officer holding his face and apparently pretending to be shot.

With Siderio's body still lying on the ground the officer is heard saying, "Am I shot?" and another officer responding

that he is not.

When a neighbor approached the officer they believed to be injured and asked if they wanted a wet paper towel to put over his eye, the officer could be heard saying, “I’m fine” and walked away.

In typical fashion, none of the officers have been charged, merely being placed on paid leave while the city government conducts an investigation.

Last year, in a nearby suburb of Philadelphia, 8-year-old Fanta Bility was shot and killed while leaving a high school football game with her family. In that case, police opened fire on a car with two girls in it who were also leaving the football game. Police claimed to be responding to nearby gun fire, which they say was coming from the car. Most of the police shots missed the car, hitting several of the people who attended the game, killing Fanta.

According to the *Washington Post* database on police shootings, 138 people have been killed by police so far this year, keeping pace with last year’s total of 1,055 people killed, the highest number since the *Post* started collecting data in 2014. Like Siderio, many have been ruthlessly gunned down in the street.

The *Washington Post* database is based on media reports, social media posts and the scanning of police records, and therefore an undercount. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) keeps its own database but it relies upon local police departments to self-report shootings, which in the vast majority of cases they do not do.

A look at the data shows that the largest number of those killed are white, while African Americans and Hispanics are disproportionately killed. While blacks make up just 13 percent of the US population, they make up nearly a third of those shot and killed by police. Blacks are killed at over twice the rate of whites, while Hispanics are killed just under twice the rate as whites.

However, a closer look shows that the most determining feature is not race, but class. When the numbers of poor and working class males between ages 20 and 40 are considered, the race disparity drops drastically.

Following the murder of George Floyd in the spring 2020, when Minneapolis police suffocated him by kneeling on his neck for more than eight minutes, mass protests erupted across the country and around the world. What marked these protests was their multi-racial, multi-ethnic and international character.

The upsurge of anger over police killings also reflected the anger over the murderous policy of herd immunity which has allowed hundreds of thousands to die from COVID-19 in the United States. However, this movement and anger has been diverted into racial identity politics by the Democratic Party with the aid of the Black Lives Matter movement, and

a host of pseudo-left organizations which seek to present every aspect of life in America in racial terms.

The hundreds of thousands who took part in the protests, and the millions more who supported their cause, were told that police violence would be ended with the election of more Democrats and in particular the election of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris as president and vice president.

In addition, it was claimed that the election of Democrats, including African American officials, at the local level, along with the passage of reform measures, would cause police violence to go down.

African American mayors were elected in many large and small cities, including New York, Chicago and Pittsburgh. Over 400 bills were introduced into state legislatures and many were passed. These included requirements for police to work with mental health experts, more so-called community policing, hiring of more African Americans, women and other minorities onto the police force. Many cities established civilian review boards to review use-of-force incidents.

However, none of these measures reduced police killings over the past two years and killings, in fact, have gone up. This consistency of police killings can only be understood as the outcome of systematic police terror aimed against the working class and the poor.

The Biden administration rejected the phony demand to “defund the police” and has already awarded millions meant for COVID relief to the police, as well as continued the policy of providing police with military-grade weaponry. In his State of the Union address Tuesday night, Biden explicitly called for even more funding for the police.

Nor has the election of African American officials to local government stopped the terror. In Chicago, where Lori Lightfoot, who is black, was elected mayor in 2019, the number of police killings went up from five in 2020 to eight last year.

The fight against police violence and in defense of democratic rights must be connected with the fight for the building of a mass independent political movement of the entire working class against inequality, poverty, war and the capitalist system. Only the Socialist Equality Party is fighting to build such a movement.



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