

Six teens charged with first-degree murder after fatal shooting outside Des Moines, Iowa high school

William Quartermaine
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On Monday March 7, fifteen-year-old Jose Lopez was shot and killed in a coordinated drive-by shooting outside of East High School in Des Moines, Iowa. Two female students, a sixteen-year-old and an eighteen-year-old, were seriously wounded and remain in critical condition. Their identities are being kept private until their condition has stabilized. Less than twenty-four hours after the shooting, six teenagers, all under the age of eighteen, have been arrested and charged with first degree murder along with two counts of attempted murder. The motive for the shooting remains unknown.

Police have disclosed that over 20 shell casings were recovered at the scene and the shooting involved three separate vehicles. The school was put on total lockdown Monday afternoon after gunshots were heard outside. The high school announced classes would be canceled for the week soon after all students were safely evacuated. Meanwhile, agents from the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) have been dispatched to the area along with the Iowa State Patrol, the FBI, and other law enforcement agencies.

Lopez's murder marks the fourth homicide in Des Moines, the state capital and largest city in Iowa, since the start of the new year. According to Gun Violence Archive, this tragedy marks the thirteenth mass shooting at an American K-12 school and the eightieth mass shooting overall since the start of the year. The total fatalities in these shootings have climbed to 80 while the number of injured is estimated to be at 320.

According to *Education Week*, school shootings have resulted in four deaths and 20 injuries this year alone. While in 2018 and 2019 there were 24 school shootings, 2020 saw this number dip to ten, most likely

because of remote learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, this number jumped up to 34 shootings; the highest number ever recorded by the news outlet.

The number of mass shootings and deaths skyrocketed in 2020 as COVID-19 was allowed to run rampant through the population and mass social unrest erupted in opposition to police violence. From 2014 to 2018, the average number of mass shootings per year was about 349. In 2020, there were a reported 611 mass shootings, the highest in a single year since the statistic has been calculated. This record was broken quickly in 2021 with a reported 693 mass shootings.

Speaking about Monday's shooting, Sgt. Paul Parizek from the Des Moines Police Department told the *Des Moines Register*, "while this incident occurred outside of a school, it could have happened in any one of our neighborhoods. The school is where the suspects found their target." While Parizek's words may have been intended to reassure traumatized students and parents wary about going back to school next week, they are no comfort. A high school is now just as common a place for mass murder in the United States as any neighborhood or workplace. This acceptance of school shootings is part of broader normalization of mass death by the American ruling class.

This can be seen most starkly in the "herd immunity" strategy pursued by the American government under Republicans and Democrats in response to the pandemic. The United States has an official death toll of over 960,000 due to COVID-19 with almost 80 million having been infected. The real figures accounting for excess deaths and non-reported infections are much higher.

Furthermore, the constant state of war engaged in by American imperialism over the last three decades has resulted in mass destruction, death, and more. Young people have never known a day in their lives when the US was not engaged in wars in the Middle East and Africa or preparing for much larger wars with Russia and China. Currently, the Biden administration and its NATO allies have openly provoked Russia into an invasion of Ukraine and celebrating by building up military deployments in Eastern Europe and providing Kiev with billions of dollars, weapons and training over the last eight years.

The perpetual state of war abroad, using senseless bombings and killings in order to plunder resources for the sole enrichment of its ruling class, finds its reflection at home. Through endless war and economic sanctions, the US has used every violent tool of its disposal to ensure its authority abroad while providing crushing austerity to its working class citizens and youth at home.

On top of this bloodthirsty foreign policy, first the Trump and now the Biden administrations have advocated for forcing students and teachers back into schools in order to keep parents on the job, producing record profits. What this process entailed in reality was the mass infections and deaths of teachers, students, friends, and relatives with most already underfunded public schools having only the most meager ventilation systems to deal with the uncontrolled spread of the virus. As students and teachers are given contradictory messages regarding masking, social distancing, and haphazardly enforced mitigation measures, confusion and hostility can take hold.

These homicidal policies have been met by the resistance by students, teachers, and youth. In January of this year, hundreds of high school students in Chicago walked out to protest the unsafe conditions in schools as result of in-person teaching during the pandemic. By the end of January, students in Denver, Colorado, Detroit, Michigan, and Washington D.C. all staged walkouts to protest the unsafe conditions in schools. More than 1,200 Oakland students pledged to stay home for the Spring semester unless their schools drastically improved safety measures. In February, teachers in Lincolnwood, Illinois publicly voiced their disapproval of removing mask mandates in school despite the potential consequence of losing their jobs.

The radicalization of students, teachers, workers, and youth during the pandemic is a tremendous step forward in the fight for genuine social equality. However, none of these problems exist in a vacuum: all are the result of a capitalist social order which has shamelessly enriched a microscopic minority at the expense of the millions of citizens who make up not just America, but the world.

It is the fight for genuine international socialism under a Marxist program led by the working class, students, and youth which will lead the path forward.



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