

Three-alarm house fire kills twin brothers in Trenton, New Jersey

Erik Schreiber
4 April 2022

A three-alarm fire at a house in Trenton, New Jersey, killed 20-year-old twin brothers on Saturday evening. Trenton, the capital of New Jersey is a predominantly working class city. The fire broke out at 6:53 p.m. and the brothers were stuck on the building's third floor. Family and firefighters were unable to reach them in time. The names of the brothers, who are said to have had autism, had not been disclosed as of publication.

Two other residents evacuated the home during the fire, one by jumping from a window, city officials said. Their names also have not been made public.

The fire burned the wood siding on the building's second floor, destroyed windows and caused part of the structure to collapse. The home is now uninhabitable. Red Cross New Jersey has provided temporary lodging, food and clothing to nine people from four families affected by the blaze.

"I am praying for this family who lost two sons tonight. This is heartbreaking, and we will do everything we can to support [them] to get through this," Mayor W. Reed Gusciora said in a statement.

Four firefighters were injured while responding to the fire and received treatment at nearby Capital Health Regional Medical Center. One of the firefighters sustained a burn on his face, and three were injured when parts of the building collapsed. The firefighters were later released from the medical center and are now recovering at home. As of this writing, one has been cleared to return to duty.

Neighbors described the family that lived in the house as quiet and the two victims as kind. "The guy that lives in the house, sometimes he would come and help me with my trash when he sees me struggling with it. They don't bother nobody," neighbor Ruth Davis told 6 ABC Action News.

While the cause of the fire remains officially

undetermined, June Williams, the owner of the building, told 6 ABC that the fire was started with a candle. A neighbor alerted Williams to the fire and the latter has been in contact with the family since the incident. "Every bone in my body is hurt right now for those kids," she said.

Trenton's police, health and inspections departments are investigating the fire. County and state authorities are assisting with the investigation.

The fire is only the most recent tragedy in Trenton. Eight days before the blaze occurred, nine-year-old SeQuoya Bacon-Jones was shot during a brawl in the city's downtown area. The shooting occurred despite the presence of private security officers. The girl was rushed to Capital Health Regional Medical Center, then to Robert Wood Johnson New Brunswick Hospital before being pronounced dead. Then on Thursday a 16-year-old boy died after he was shot in the face.

Trenton, which is 30 miles northeast of Philadelphia, has long been plagued by violence. For more than a decade, the city has been setting new records for its annual number of homicides. In 2020, the first year of the pandemic, the number of homicides reached 40. This total surpassed the 37 homicides recorded in 2013, which had in turn exceeded the previous record of 31 homicides in 2005. In 2005 and 2006, the Morgan Quitno survey ranked Trenton as the fourth most dangerous municipality of 126 cities with a population between 75,000 and 99,999.

This violence cannot be understood apart from the city's economic devastation. Trenton's poverty rate is a shocking 27.2 percent, according to the US Census Bureau. Only about 57 percent of residents are in the civilian labor force, and just 14 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher level of education.

These conditions are the product of the

deindustrialization and deliberate neglect that many American cities have been subjected to for decades. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, Trenton was an industrial city that produced goods such as pottery, rubber, iron and wire rope. Trenton erupted in protest, as did many other cities nationwide, after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. More than 200 businesses were burned during the unrest, and more than 300 people, predominantly young black men, were arrested. The city initially estimated that the businesses' losses totaled \$7 million.

After the riots, the city's industries began closing as part of an economic process that took place across the country. By the 1970s, crime and urban blight had increased. In 1983, Trenton was selected as an Urban Enterprise Zone, a designation given to a distressed area by the state of New Jersey. Such zones offer tax giveaways and relaxed regulation to attract business and investment. The city's persistent poverty and crime attest to the fact that businesses and banks are the only entities that have benefited from this program in the past four decades.

The tragic fire that claimed two young lives and destroyed a house in Trenton must be understood in the context of decades of attacks on the working class. Former industrial cities like New Jersey's capital have seen jobs destroyed, infrastructure and housing neglected and living conditions driven to an abysmal level. Whatever the immediate cause of the fire, it took place in dire social conditions that serve as an indictment of the capitalist system.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact