

National Guard soldiers kill 20-year-old Tyrin Johnson in Memphis, Tennessee

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Two Tennessee National Guard soldiers shot and killed 20-year-old Tyrin Johnson in downtown Memphis early Sunday morning, July 5, the latest and deadliest result of the Trump administration's military-police occupation of the city.

According to the official account given by Memphis police and the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI), officers responded shortly before 4:00 a.m. to reports of gunfire near Ida B. Wells Avenue and Union Avenue. Police claim that Johnson was seen carrying a handgun and fleeing on foot. National Guard soldiers assigned to the Memphis Safe Task Force joined the pursuit. Police allege that Johnson turned toward the soldiers with the weapon, after which two Guardsmen opened fire, striking and killing him.

Even in the police version of events, Johnson is not accused of firing at police or the National Guard. The TBI statement says only that he "reportedly fired shots in the area" before the chase began. The official narrative therefore amounts to the claim that Johnson was executed for fleeing and allegedly turning around during a pursuit. As of this writing, no photograph or video of the alleged weapon has been released by authorities or published by major news outlets reviewed by the WSWs.

Johnson died at the scene after two National Guard medical specialists attempted first aid, according to Guard spokesperson Lt. Col. Darrin Haas. No police officers or Guardsmen were injured. Johnson's cousin, Terracle Nelson, said authorities told the family that Johnson had been shot twice in the chest. The TBI declined to comment on that account, and authorities have not answered questions about how many shots were fired.

Johnson's family has demanded the release of video footage. His grandfather, Evaniel Johnson, told the Associated Press that Tyrin had taken classes at Tennessee State University, was the father of a young child, was preparing to help lead the family construction business and was passionate about making music. "He still had so much life ahead of him," his grandfather said.

Memphis Mayor Paul Young, a Democrat, issued a muted

statement, calling the killing an "unfortunate incident" and saying he would wait for the TBI investigation before commenting further. Young did not call for the withdrawal of the National Guard from Memphis, nor has any leading figure in the Democratic Party demanded an end to the military-police occupation of the city.

The killing of Johnson is not an aberration. It is the direct product of the Memphis Safe Task Force, established by Trump in September 2025 as part of his drive to normalize the deployment of soldiers and federal police in American cities.

Trump's order created the task force to carry out "hypervigilant policing," "aggressive prosecution" and the "large-scale saturation" of neighborhoods with law enforcement personnel. In reality, the occupation of Memphis has nothing to do with fighting crime or protecting the population. It is aimed at normalizing the deployment of armed soldiers in urban areas, suppressing protests and strikes and intimidating the working class.

The task force includes the U.S. Marshals Service, FBI, ATF, DEA, Homeland Security Investigations, ICE, the Tennessee Highway Patrol and local police agencies. As of Sunday, 1,450 National Guard soldiers were assigned to the Memphis Safe Task Force. All soldiers assigned to the task force are deputized by the U.S. Marshals Service on the day they join.

This is at least the fifth violent incident involving the Memphis Safe Task Force since October 2025 in which TBI investigators have been summoned. Of those five investigations, four involved shootings, two were fatal and one involved a person being run over.

This is not the first time National Guard soldiers have killed American civilians. In 2020, during the nationwide protests following the police murder of George Floyd, Kentucky National Guard members shot and killed David McAtee, a popular Louisville barbecue cook, outside his business. In 1992, during the Los Angeles uprising after the acquittal of the police officers who beat Rodney King, Marvin Rivas, a 25-year-old resident, was shot and killed by

National Guard troops. The most infamous case remains the Kent State massacre of May 4, 1970, when Ohio National Guardsmen fired into a crowd of antiwar demonstrators, killing four students and wounding nine.

The shooting in Memphis took place during a weekend of police-state spectacle across the country. In Washington D.C., the Trump administration's July 4 "Freedom 250" celebration turned the National Mall into a militarized zone, with fences, closed roads, screenings and heavy police and Secret Service presence.

On the other side of the country, police in Newport Beach, California, arrested 402 people during July 4 celebrations, after social media posts reportedly drew large numbers of juveniles and young adults to the beach. More than 350 officers from Newport Beach and 17 regional law enforcement agencies were deployed to clear the area after an "unlawful assembly" declaration.

The hypocrisy is glaring. Young people using social media to meet up at the beach and set off fireworks are treated as a criminal threat requiring mass arrests, mounted police and regional mobilization. But the Trump administration's militarized Independence Day spectacle, complete with security checkpoints, military occupations, closed streets and a massive fireworks display, is presented as a celebration of "freedom."

The Trump administration is spearheading the creation of a police-military dictatorship. But it is doing so with the cooperation of the Democratic Party. Memphis Mayor Paul Young, a Democrat, did not request the National Guard, but after Trump and Tennessee Governor Bill Lee ordered the deployment, the mayor chose to collaborate with the task force rather than mobilize political opposition to it. The city of Memphis is not part of the lawsuit challenging the deployment.

Young has repeatedly sought to present this collaboration as a pragmatic effort to steer the federal occupation toward "violent crime." In an interview with WKNO last October, Young said, "What we were told as this was beginning is that this surge is going to be about violent crime... If there are individuals that have issues with documentation and status that are a part of any efforts around violent crime, then certainly they would be turned over to ICE."

Young's collaboration was so open that then-Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem held up Memphis as a model following the killings of Renée Nicole Good and Alex Pretti in Minneapolis during federal immigration operations, which triggered mass protests and calls for a general strike. "I'll point to the city of Memphis, which is where there is a Democrat mayor in place," Noem said. "He worked with us and our federal law enforcement officers, and we saw murder rates drop by 50 percent because of that

partnership."

Young responded by insisting that Memphis was not collaborating with ICE on immigration enforcement, while admitting that the city had worked with federal agencies through the Memphis Safe Task Force on "violent crime." This distinction is a fraud. The task force itself includes DHS agencies like ICE and operates within the same federal-police framework used by the Trump administration to terrorize immigrants, suppress protests and accustom the population to armed militarized patrols in American cities.

The national Democratic Party has not launched any campaign against the occupation of Memphis or the deployment of National Guard soldiers in American cities. Tennessee Senate Democratic Leader Raamesh Akbari and Senate Democratic Caucus Chair London Lamar, both of Memphis, called Johnson's killing a "tragic incident" and demanded a "clear and transparent accounting." But their statement was limited to calls for the release of video and did not demand the immediate withdrawal of the Guard.

The killing of Tyrin Johnson is a warning. Once soldiers are deployed on the streets under the pretext of fighting crime, they will inevitably be used as an armed force against the entire population. The official claim that Johnson "turned" with a weapon must be treated with the utmost skepticism. The police and military have lied countless times after killing civilians, and in this case they have not even claimed that Johnson fired at them.

The demand must be raised for the immediate release of all body camera footage, surveillance footage, radio traffic and reports related to the killing of Johnson. The names of the Guardsmen who fired must be made public. But the issue goes far beyond one investigation.

The Memphis Safe Task Force must be disbanded. The National Guard and all federal police agencies must be withdrawn from Memphis and every city in the country. The police, the immigration Gestapo and the military apparatus used to enforce inequality, deportations and the waging of imperialist war must be abolished.



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