

Detroit police chief says block party shooting carried out by “urban terrorists”

By Zac Corrigan
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Speaking at a press conference held in the aftermath of a neighborhood shooting that resulted in one death and 11 injuries in Detroit last weekend, the city’s police chief, James Craig, used the term “urban terrorists” to describe the perpetrators. Craig also attacked residents, who distrust Detroit’s corrupt and violent police force, for refusing to “step up” and provide information about the crime.

“You will allow this to continue if you do nothing,” said Craig, adding, “These *are* urban terrorists, and if somebody’s offended by it, you know, let’s get over it and help us find out who’s responsible for this. We know you know.”

Craig’s choice of words is extremely ominous, as is his implication that residents have enabled the attackers to remain at large. When used by the US government, the term “terrorist” refers to a person to whom the US Constitution and international law effectively do not apply. President Barack Obama orders the assassination of alleged terrorists, including US citizens, in drone strikes overseas. Washington asserts its right to detain terror suspects indefinitely at Guantanamo Bay, even after their innocence has been established. When its own establishments are not able to mete out the savage levels of violence required, the US government renders individuals that it deems terrorists to black sites around the world.

“Counterterrorism” is one of the explicit pretexts of the Pentagon’s 1033 program, which provides tens of thousands of local and state police agencies with military-grade vehicles, weapons, ammunition, and other equipment, such as the tank-like MRAP vehicles rolled out in response to protests against police violence in Ferguson and Baltimore. Under federal law, those found guilty of aiding terrorists can be imprisoned for life. In 2013, the entire city of Boston

was placed under police/military siege and officers forced families from their homes at gunpoint during a manhunt for a single teenaged terror suspect.

That in the face of such threats no one, including the hundreds who were at the party at the time of the shooting, has come forward to identify the shooters reflects the depth of the hostility felt within the population toward the police and the “war on terror.” Nationwide, police have killed more than 500 people so far this year, including two on Detroit’s west side near where Jones lived and died. In nearby Inkster, Michigan, a video recording of police severely beating and planting cocaine on a 57-year-old auto worker was widely circulated on the Internet.

At a meeting on Tuesday held in the neighborhood where last weekend’s shooting occurred, police officers and Detroit City Council member Brenda Jones (no relation to the deceased) again demanded that residents “come together as a community” to identify the shooters. Residents, however, pointed to the massive levels of inequality in the city as the problem. Wearing a t-shirt that said “#witness,” neighborhood resident Denolius Burkes told WXYZ Detroit, “The mayor has to start pouring money into this community.” Melissa Brown, another attendee, said, “You need to treat this area like you do downtown.”

Unlike downtown Detroit, where billions are being invested to develop a few square miles of the city into a white-collar business campus and playground for the upper-middle class, the neighborhood where the shooting took place has been ravaged by plant closings and utility shutoffs. Poverty abounds, as do vacant and burned-out homes. The shooting took place near the site of the Dexter Avenue fire of January 2010, in which three people burned to death in a space-heater accident after having their heat shut off by local

utilities monopoly DTE.

The community center where Jones was killed is itself currently closed. Its chairperson, Helen Moore, told the *Detroit News* that this was due to a large unpaid water bill. Mayor Mike Duggan (Democrat) is currently overseeing the shutoff of water service to up to one-third of Detroit residences, while major businesses which owe millions in overdue bills, such as automakers Chrysler and General Motors, are allowed to keep their water on.

Detroit is the poorest big city in America, where about 60 percent of children live in poverty. It is no coincidence that it also has the highest violent crime rate among American cities with populations over 200,000. In 2013 alone, by the FBI's count, 316 murders and 14,500 violent crimes took place in Detroit.

Mass unemployment, due, above all, to the shuttering of auto factories; widespread school closings (Detroit has more for-profit charter schools than any other city except New Orleans); cuts to food stamps, to health care and to pensions; the shutoff of water and utilities to the very poor; endless police and military violence and the exoneration of killer cops—these and other social factors have created an unbearable situation for the vast majority of people in Detroit. Between last weekend and the following Monday, at least six more people were shot in the city, with several dying from their injuries.

The attitude of local authorities to Detroit's impoverished population found expression in the city's decision to impose an 8 p.m. curfew on Monday evening, the night of Detroit's annual fireworks display. In a close 4-3 decision, the city council narrowly rejected a proposal from Craig to extend the curfew to four nights. Over 70 people requested to comment on the curfew at the public hearing where the decision was made, with most opposing it. One young woman denounced the curfew as "treating us like criminals."

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