

Unarmed youth shot down in Detroit suburb as US police killings continue

By Tom Hall
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Early Monday morning, police in the Detroit suburb of Royal Oak shot and killed Cody Reynolds, a 20-year-old white youth, while responding to reports of a domestic assault. While Reynolds had allegedly stabbed his mother and hit his father with a guitar, he was unarmed when he encountered police. Reynolds was killed less than 30 seconds after police first arrived on the scene.

It was the second fatal shooting by police in a little over a month, in a city which has yet to experience another murder in 2018. In other words, the police themselves are responsible for all of the homicides in Royal Oak so far this year.

Cody, who had worked as a busboy at a local restaurant, was described as a gregarious and kind young man by friends and acquaintances who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site*. However, his life was thrown into turmoil when he struck and paralyzed a woman during a drunk driving incident, for which he was on probation at the time of his death.

Dashboard camera footage released to the media shows him at first complying with the orders of the responding officer, placing both hands on his head and lying down on the ground. It is clear from the footage that Cody is not holding a weapon. Suddenly, for reasons which are not yet clear, the young man gets up from the ground and begins moving in the direction of the police car. Several shots ring out off camera just after Reynolds disappears from the left side of the picture.

Royal Oak Police Chief Corrigan O'Donohue defended the actions of the officer in a press conference, declaring, "There is no way the officer could have known" that Reynolds was unarmed. "If someone is willing to assault their parents, they'd be willing to assault anybody," he added. While the officer, who has not been named, has been assigned to desk duty pending a standard review, O'Donohue said that "Based on the preliminary investigation ... there is nothing that really jumps out as

misconduct."

Several of Cody's former co-workers spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* about his death. "Cody was creative, honest, and intelligent, yet soft spoken. He had such an innocence about him, which is why this is so confusing and shocking," one said. "I know there are people who knew him better than me but we still managed to laugh and smile every time we worked together."

A coworker who wished to remain anonymous noted, "I remember Cody best by his sweet smile and bright eyes. When I first met him he was quite shy, but we quickly got to know each other and shared plenty of laughs. He was an eager worker and was always there to listen. Cody was helpful and respectful at work, and equally so outside of work. Cody was so sweet, and he leaves behind MANY people who loved, valued, and cared about him.

"I regret not getting to know him on a deeper level, for talking to him while he patiently listened, instead of the other way around...but I suppose a lot of people might easily feel that way at a time like this."

Another former coworker said, "It's unbelievable that they think this [shooting] is acceptable."

Cody's death was the second police killing in two days in the metro Detroit area. On Sunday, a state trooper in Dearborn Heights shot and killed Jim Collins Jr., a 38-year-old white man, walking down Telegraph Road while allegedly holding a loaded rifle.

A spokesman for the state police told the press that "as the officer made contact with the individual, there were some words exchanged back and forth. And the officer fired shots at the suspect, hitting him and killing him." In other words, even according to the vaguely worded official police account, which invariably presents the actions of the police in the best possible light, the responding officer was not in any immediate danger when he opened fire.

These two killings in the Detroit suburbs are part of a never-ending wave of police killings, which continue at a breakneck pace throughout the United States. According to the website KilledbyPolice.net, cops killed 418 people from January 1 through April 30, 2018. This rate, more than 100 per month, is higher than any other four-month span over the past five years.

A separate study by the *Washington Post* called Fatal Force, which tracks only deaths by firearms, but which includes more recent police killings, found that 387 people have been shot and killed by police so far this year.

Police have no doubt been emboldened by Trump's fascistic law-and-order rhetoric, imploring police in a speech last year not to be "too nice" with suspects and deploying the military to the border to help with deportations of immigrants and refugees. At the same time, Trump's opponents in the Democratic Party, in the course of their anti-Russian "fake news" hysteria, have blackguarded opponents of police brutality as the dupes of Russian meddling.

A study published last week in the *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health* sheds light on the scale of police killings and their consequences for public health. The authors used the reported ages of victims of police killings and subtracted them from average life expectancy in order to estimate the "years of life lost (YLL)," a common metric used in epidemiology to measure the impact of various diseases and public health problems.

The study found that more than 100,000 years of life were lost in 2015 and 2016 alone due to police killings.

The authors note the annual rate is comparable to the years lost to meningitis and maternal deaths during childbirth, and greater than the years of life lost due to cyclist injuries and unintentional firearm deaths. "Yet, many of these conditions receive more attention than police violence, in terms of grant funding, for example," the authors note.

Indeed, there are no comprehensive nationwide government statistics on police killings, in violation of federal laws that have been on the books for decades. Instead, the authors were forced to use independent research conducted by the British *Guardian* newspaper, which compiled information on US police killings for its online database The Counted.

The researchers added that "the burden of police violence in society measured in this study" is underestimated because it does not deal with the "burden

of non-fatal injuries, long-term disability and indirect effects of police violence including trauma to families and social networks, stress-related health outcomes and government instability."

The study included demographic breakdowns by race and age, and found that, while whites suffered the largest share of total years of life lost out of all racial groups, blacks and minorities suffered higher rates per-capita, consistent with previous demographic studies of police killings. However, the study also found elevated YLL rates among young people of all races, especially among those aged 25-34. The study found that the median age at death was "notably lower" among minorities than among whites, although this is at least partly explained by higher average ages among whites.

The study demonstrates that, while race plays a role in police killings, police violence affects people of all races and that whites enjoy no special "privileges" when it comes to killer cops.

Nor does the skin color of police chiefs and elected officials make them less likely to shield killer cops from responsibility. AJ Connors, the black mayor of Warsaw, North Carolina, where the choking of a black youth by a white cop outside of a Waffle House sparked mass outrage when it was exposed in a cellphone video, defended the actions of the officer in a recorded statement, declaring that the officer "did what he had to do."

The Obama administration, for its part, sided with police in every civil rights case to appear before the Supreme Court.

What is common to almost all of the roughly 1,100 people that are killed by police each year is that they are poor and working class.

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