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The Body Count Rises in the U.S. War Against Black People

By Ajamu Baraka
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Before we can even process the acquittal of the murders of Philado Castile, we hear about another murder of a black person by the police occupation forces. This time the victim, Charleena Lyles, is a black woman who was also five months pregnant.

Again, there is anger, confusion and calls for justice from the black community of Seattle, where the latest killing took place. Many might remember that it was in Seattle where two members of the local black community attempted to call out the racist and hypocritical liberal white community during a visit by Bernie Sanders. The black activists were subsequently shouted

down by a majority of Bernie's supporters. One of the issues that the activists wanted to raise was the repressive, heavy-handed tactics of the Seattle Police Department.

Some have argued that this rash of killings of black people caught on video or reported by dozens of witnesses is nothing new, that the images of police choking, shooting and beating poor black and working-class people is now more visible because of technological innovations that make it easier to capture these images. They are partially right.

As an internal colony in what some refer to as a prison house of nations that characterizes the U.S. nation state, black communities are separated into enclaves of economic exploitation and social degradation by visible and often invisible social and economic processes. The police have played the role not of protectors of the unrealized human rights of black people but as occupation forces. In those occupied zones of repression, everyone knows that the police operate from a different script than the ones presented in the cop shows that permeate popular entertainment culture in the U.S. In those shows, the police are presented as heroic forces battling the forces of evil, which sometimes causes them to see the law and the rights of individuals as impediments. For many viewers, brutality and other practices is forgiven and even supported because the police are supposedly dealing with the evil irrational forces that lurk in the bowels of the barrios and ghettos in the imagination of the public.

It was perfectly plausible for far too many white people in the U.S. that a wounded Mike Brown, already shot and running away from Darren Wilson, the cop who eventually murdered Michael, would then turn around and run back at Wilson, who claimed he had no other choice but to engulf Michael in a hail of bullets killing this "demon" as Wilson described him. And unfortunately, many whites will find a way to understand how Charleena, who called the police herself to report a burglary, would then find herself dead at the hands of the police she called.

But the psychopathology of white supremacy is not the focus here. We have commented on that issue on numerous occasions. The concern is with some black people who have not grasped the new conditions that we find ourselves in—that black people don't understand that there will never be justice as defined by the cessation of these kinds of killings. Why? Because incarceration, police killings, beatings, charging our children as adults and locking them away for decades, all of these are inherent in the logic of repression that has always characterized the relationship between the U.S. racist settler-state and black people.

In other words, if Black people really want this to stop we have to come to the difficult conclusion, for some, that the settler-colonial, capitalist, white supremacist state and society is the enemy of black people and most oppressed people in the world. Difficult for many because it means that Black people can no longer deny the fact that we are not equal members of this society, that we are seen as the enemy and that our lives, concerns, perspectives, history and desires for the future are of no concern to the rulers of this state and for vast numbers of ordinary whites.

That is why Charleena Lyles joins Mike Brown, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, John Crawford and Philando Castile, just a few of the names of our people victimized in the prime of their lives by the protectors of white power wearing police uniforms.

She will not be the last.

The logic of neoliberal capitalism has transformed our communities and peoples into a sector of the U.S. population that is no longer needed. This new reality buttressed by white supremacist ideology that is unable to see the equal value of non-European (white) life has created a precarious situation for black people, more precarious, than any other period in U.S. history.

African (Black) people are a peaceful people and believe in justice. But there can be no peace without justice. For as long as our people are under attack, as long as our fundamental collective human rights are not recognized, as long as we don't have the ability to determine our own collective fate, we will resist, we will fight, and we will create the conditions to make sure that the war being waged against us will not continue to be a one-sided conflict.

The essence of the People(s)-Centered Human Rights framework is that the oppressed have a right to right to resist, the right to self-determination, and the right to use whatever means necessary to protect and realize their fundamental rights.

Charleena, we will say your name and the names of all who have fallen as we deliver the final death-blow against this organized barbarism known as the U.S.