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South Bronx residents say Ferguson unrest is about class

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Anger over the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and the violent police and military reaction to the subsequent protests is especially widespread in the working class neighborhoods of New York City. Workers and young people in the city have long been subjected to violent abuse, including numerous killings, by the New York City Police Department, the most recent being the brutal chokehold death of Eric Garner in the borough of Staten Island only last month. The city was notorious until recently for the “Stop and Frisk” policy of systematic intimidation utilized by the police to harass hundreds of thousands of primarily minority youth.

A WSWS reporting team visited the South Bronx, the most impoverished area of the country outside of Puerto Rico. The South Bronx is no stranger to police violence. In 1999, the NYPD carried out the infamous killing of an unarmed 23-year old immigrant, Amadou Diallo, shooting him with 41 bullets on the steps of his house when he reached to get his ID.

The reporters asked residents about their views on the situation in Ferguson. Time and again, the workers expressed the understanding that what is happening in Missouri is part of a national and, indeed, global pattern, and is primarily an issue of class and the economic crisis. They also

Anthony Williams is self-employed in the scrap metal business. He is concerned about the use of police and the military to suppress the population. “What is going on in America? The

militarized police are trying to stop people from protesting. They are trying to make it so you can't say someone is doing something wrong if they are a cop.

"It is not just black. It is white and red also being killed by the police, but there are more blacks being killed. However, I remember in 2011 in California the police beat and killed a white schizophrenic. I believe his name was Richard. They had video and audio of the police beating and killing him too, but they were acquitted."

"You ask what Rev. Al Sharpton, Jesse Jackson and the Black Panther Party are doing in Ferguson," Williams went on. "They are opportunists. None of them are doing anything, and more people are being killed."

"In the White House, nobody has any love for the black man. Obama came to say you should protect people's rights and the news people. But they shelter the police. They call it the blue wall. Then he went back on vacation. I can't believe I worked so hard to get Obama elected. I talked to people, persuaded them and even drove people to the polls to vote. If this is not a cover-up, I don't know what is."

Christopher Arroyo, 27, is going back to school to study computer science in hopes of improving on his current employment as a security guard, with low pay, no benefits and irregular hours. He pays attention to history and current developments. "I don't think there is any difference between the Democrats and Republicans. It is an illusion of choice. I don't have health insurance. I have seen lines of people waiting for approval for specific treatments. I have heard of people dying while waiting. There are more people on food stamps. In 2004, it was around ten million on food stamps and now it is around 47 million."

Jachan Kitt is going to start a program to get his GED (high school equivalency diploma) and works delivering for the "Meals On Wheels" program for seniors. He rejected the idea that these killings are simply the result of racism. "It is not about the color of the police. Forget about color. Everybody sees it as there should be a reason Michael Brown is dead, that this should be the last such killing. People compare it the killing of Amadou Diallo and a lot of other police killings. This whole story made me go back to Sean Bell [a 23 year old man killed by the NYPD in 2006 in a hail of 50 bullets on what was to be his wedding day]. I was reading on him last night. It was his bachelor party. Amadou Diallo, he was just discussing his rent and went out on the steps."

Kitt sees the incident in Ferguson in a larger context. "There are probably many towns and cities we don't hear about going through the same things like Missouri. All around the world, in places like Egypt, they criticize the US about what they saw from Missouri. The people in power spend all their time putting money in their pockets. People are thinking in the wrong places. We make the people who make the rules. We make them more powerful. There has to be something new."

Taking the WSWS flyer, Tracy Jackson commented, "The thing in Ferguson has to do with the rich people having the blacks, whites and Hispanics fighting each other. It basically keeps them on top. They make money by divide and conquer. The jail system is now a money-maker. The

Ferguson cop saw it as a war zone rather than a community. He should have known everyone in the community, and these kids. They were just kids.”

He mentioned the worldwide economic crisis. “I am a plasterer for the city. I don’t see a future there for me. They have had cutbacks. Even the Wall Street bankers are saying we need the middle class to keep the economy running. I think they want to collapse the economy. They want everybody to work for nothing. The president bailed these guys out. But they are not putting money into the economy. Even China and India are going to get into the same situation. Socialism is not a bad word, like they try to make it. The U.S. is just about getting production out of the worker.”

Kenyetta Garvey was in the military, has just graduated from college, and is looking for a job. “Everything is connected,” he said. “When one country is trying to take from another country like the US is doing in Iraq, it is uncalled for. They are trying to kill so many people.

“I just graduated from Penn State University. There is no American dream anymore. All I have is tens of thousands of dollars of debt I can’t pay off, and no job. America has its riches. People immigrated to America from near and far. Now they are taking jobs away from here and outsourcing them for low wages and bad working conditions.

“The same people who supported Obama’s election now support the Republicans. I wasn’t taken in by this, but there is no green grass in America any more. Even in the 1990s, things looked nice. Now things are much worse.

“What has happened in Ferguson is a catalyst. A lot of people thought Obama was going to make great changes. Now people think how come you have a 1% class controlling the country? You need drastic changes.”