

Police shooting forces discussion of Madison's racial divide

By **SCOTT BAUER, Associated Press**

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Mariah Stevens of Madison, Wis., left, is hugged by Destiny Marshall of Atlanta during a protest of the shooting of Tony Robinson at the state Capitol on Monday. Robinson, 19, was fatally shot Friday night by a police officer. (AP Photo/Wisconsin State Journal, Michael P. King)

MADISON, Wisconsin (AP) — Madison takes pride in being named one of the best places in the U.S. to live, raise a family and retire. It's also known as a liberal haven with a long history of progressive politics.

But the fatal shooting of an unarmed biracial man by a white police officer in the heart of one of the city's most liberal neighborhoods is forcing a renewed discussion about the racial divide in a community where African-Americans make up 7 percent of the population but account for a disproportionate share of arrests, incarcerations and children in poverty.

"Madison relies on its progressive history and past to ignore the current realities," said Sergio Gonzalez, a 27-year-old graduate student at the University of Wisconsin. "It's unfortunate it takes the death of a 19-year-old to open up the eyes of Madison."

Tony Robinson was shot and killed by police officer Matt Kenny early Friday evening. Kenny was investigating a call that a young man was jumping in and out of traffic and had assaulted someone. The officer heard a disturbance and forced his way into an apartment where Robinson had gone. Authorities said Kenny fired after Robinson assaulted him.

The Associated Press had described Robinson as black based on police descriptions of him as African-American. But at a news conference Monday, family members repeatedly emphasized that he embraced a biracial identity from having a white mother and black father.

Since the shooting, the police chief and mayor — both white — have struck a conciliatory tone with black leaders, who have organized peaceful protests. The police chief apologized Monday without acknowledging any wrongdoing by the officer or the department. An investigation by the state Department of Justice is ongoing.

Those who have worked for years on addressing Madison's racial disparities hope that the shooting brings new attention to underlying problems in the city of 240,000 that is anchored by the University of Wisconsin campus and the state Capitol.

A 2013 report by Wisconsin Children and Families analyzed census data to paint a picture of two Madisons — one where white people were thriving and blacks were struggling.

The report showed that the unemployment rate for blacks in Dane County, which includes Madison, was 25 percent in 2011 compared with 5 percent for whites. That was a larger divide than both the state and national average.

Other statistics are even more striking. The percentage of black children living in poverty in Madison was 58 percent over a three-year period ending in 2013, compared with 5 percent for white children. Nationally, 38 percent of black children were in poverty over that time.

“This is one of the best places in America, and I love this community,” said Michael Johnson, leader of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County. “But until we solve some of the issues in this city, we can't call ourselves progressive.”

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Sean Kurnow ↗ Guest · a month ago

oh brother, facepalm..racism is a cop out, a way for simpletons to ignore social, economic and political factors.

racist logic:

a black person commits a crime...all black people are guilty

a latino person commits a crime...all latinos are guilty

a white person commits a crime...its an anomaly and shouldn't reflect on all white people.

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