

# 2015 ends with more police injustice

BY CASH MICHAELS  
FOR THE CHRONICLE

The week began with the city of Chicago in mourning after police there "accidentally" shot and killed 55-year-old Bettie Jones on Dec. 27, an unarmed downstairs neighbor who



## Analysis

had just opened the door to let in officers responding to a domestic disturbance call. Chicago police also killed college student Quintonio LeGrier at the same address, who was said to have had a mental illness. LeGrier's father called police for assistance when his son became angry and began hitting the door with a baseball bat. Ms. Jones was a devout churchwoman, neighbors and relatives said. They couldn't understand why Chicago police couldn't use tasers to subdue young LeGrier, instead of deadly force.

Embattled Chicago Mayor Rahm Emmanuel rushed home from a 16-day vacation, amid growing cries for his resignation, and a federal investigation into a string of prior police killings in his city.

On Monday in Cleveland, Ohio, after more than a year, Cuyahoga County



Prosecutor Timothy McGinty announced that a grand jury did not indict two Cleveland police officers for the November 2014 fatal shooting of 12-year-old Tamir Rice, who had only a pellet gun on him in a park when the officers immediately shot the child within two seconds of pulling up on the scene. It became clear that McGinty never sought to indict the officers, but rather cajole the grand jury not to hold them responsible, claiming that the officers feared for their lives.

Tamir Rice's family and their attorneys blasted McGinty, charging that it was never his intention to hold the police officers accountable, and instead blamed the young boy for "looking older and bigger than his age."

Back in Chicago on Tuesday, Chicago Police Officer Jerry Van Dyke pled not guilty to six counts of murder after being seen on an October 2014 police video allegedly shooting 17-year-old Laquan

McDonald 16 times, most of the shots hitting the young black teen as he laid helpless in the middle of the street, surrounded by other police officers who never fired a shot.

Thousands of demonstrators marched, rallied and blocked traffic in downtown Chicago leading up to the Christmas holidays to protest the yearlong delay of the release of the McDonald video, demanding Mayor Emmanuel's resignation in the aftermath of the firing of the police superintendent there. McDonald's family had already been paid a \$5 million settlement by the Chicago City Council long before the video's release.

These cases, just this week, in addition to a grand jury in Texas last week refusing to indict any officers for the death of Sandra Bland, a 28-year-old black female motorist found dead in her jail cell after she was arrested for a minor traffic violation, have set the stage for a tension-filled

2016 between law enforcement and the communities of color which they serve. Thanks to the Black Lives Matter movement, young people across the nation have taken to the streets to peacefully, but forcefully, hold police departments accountable for their seemingly unbridled use of excessive force against African-Americans.

In Minnesota, demonstrators blocked an airport terminal after causing chaos at the Mall of America right before Christmas, all to protest the police shooting death of Jamar Clark. Authorities have refused to release the video of the deadly encounter.

Observers contrast these recent incidents with what did not happen just last Saturday night at a Louisville, Ky. mall, St. Matthew, where 2,000 white teenagers reportedly engaged fights, disruptive behavior, harassment of customers and store employees, and confrontations with police officers to the point where reinforcements from neighboring towns had to be called, and the mall closed an hour early.

And yet, there were no arrests, and not one officer fired a shot, even though there were reports of gunshots heard prior to the police arriving.

When asked why there were no arrests for what many who were there called "a riot," a police spokesperson said, "Our focus was on restoring order and dispersing the crowd."

## 2015

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The Mass Moral March was spearheaded by the N.C. NAACP, which is suing the State of North Carolina over the 2013 law that restricts voting rights. The N.C. NAACP accuses North Carolina of targeting minority and poor people to suppress their voting rights.

The march was held on the first day of the hearing in the lawsuit. N.C. NAACP vs. McCrory lasted weeks. The judge has not issued a decision in the case.

The lawsuit was divided after the state of North Carolina this summer made a legal maneuver regarding voter IDs before the trial began. The new law provides a way for voters who say they could not get an approved ID to vote.

### Civil rights

The issue of police officers using deadly force against black people took the forefront in 2014 with the fatal shooting of Michael Brown, and it hasn't died down because more cases have arisen. In Winston-Salem, the family of Travis Page and the African-American community wait to see the video showing Page's arrest and the reports that give details on what happened when Page died in police custody in November. People have protested to get answers. Police Chief Barry Rountree asked for calm and patience in the case. Police say the 31-year-old was pepper sprayed when he resisted arrest and later died. Police say they responded to a shots-fired call and found Page at the scene. He fit the description of the suspect, they said.

### Violence and prayer

Outrage and grief touched Winston-Salem after nine black church members were fatally shot by a white man in Charleston, S.C., after the man spent at least an hour with them at a Wednesday night prayer service. Several churches and organizations held vigils and programs to speak out against gun violence and gun laws they believe are too lenient. Several people in the area knew some of the victims or had ties to the families of the victims.

Violence touched Winston-Salem State University (WSSU) when on Nov. 1, just a few hours after Homecoming activities came to an end, news of a fatal shooting on campus traveled through social media. Another student was wounded at the scene. A prayer vigil and memorial service were held for student Anthony White Jr. Jarrett Jerome Moore from Charlotte was arrested. He had attended WSSU at some point, WSSU officials say.

### Nonprofits tangle

In May The Salvation Army asked that a property it was buying be rezoned so that it could house its family homeless shelter. An uproar erupted in East Winston when opponents in essence cried out "Not in My Back Yard" and protested the move. Other nonprofits led the protest. Opponents said the move would bring the Cleveland Avenue area down because of the homeless families and could lead to more violence. The Salvation Army withdrew its petition to rezone the property in July.



File Photo by Tevin Stinson

The Mass Moral Monday March for voting rights began at the Corpening Plaza and made its way to the federal courthouse, where protesters were joined by more protesters on July 13.

### Transportation

City officials shocked the community when they announced in April that the venerable bus system in Winston-Salem will get its first extensive overhaul in four decades. The Winston-Salem Transit Authority sketched out new routes and presented them to the public over several weeks. Many people complained about the proposed routes, which cut off bus service to some streets that had had the service for decades. The Transit Authority tweaked the routes after input from government officials and the public. On Dec. 21 the Transit Authority presented the final plan to City Council, which approved it. The plan is scheduled to be fully operational in 2017.

### Elections

In January N.C. Sen. Earline Parmon changed her career path while still a state senator. She is director of outreach to the newly elected congresswoman for the 12th District, Alma Adams. The Rev. Dr. Paul Lowe added state senator to his resume when Democratic officials elected him to replace Parmon. Lowe has filed to run for his first full Senate term.

North Carolina Republicans moved the primary elections from a date in May to March 15 to have more political clout in the 2016 presidential race. However, that means everything has been moved up two months, including registering to vote. The last day to register to vote in the primaries is Feb. 19.

The Republican presidential race touched Winston-Salem in the fall when black candidate Ben Carson visited the area. The Ministers' Conference of Winston-Salem and Vicinity denounced Carson in September when he appeared in Winston-Salem at a church after he said a Muslim should not be president. The Ministers' Conference spoke against rich businessman and GOP candidate Donald Trump over his racist comments against African-Americans and Latinos while fellow preachers outside of the area met with him and praised him.

### Education

Residents who live near Hanes/Lowrance Middle School on Indiana Avenue were angry in March when they found out the contamination that

caused the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County School Board to close the school could be affecting their properties. They wanted answers to the dozens of questions they have concerning the soil and air quality of their neighborhood. The City of Winston-Salem in May told residents that it will be expanding its scope into potential groundwater contamination in the area. It appears the testing continues.

Meanwhile, students have been moved to other schools in the area for the 2015-16 school year.

On the college level, Elwood L. Robinson was sworn in as the 13th chancellor of Winston-Salem State University in November.

The university is seeking support for a Connect NC bond referendum on the March 15 primary ballot that will provide \$50 million for a new sciences building.

### Legal eagle

North Carolina's U.S. senators, Richard Burr and Thom Tillis, tried to stop Loretta Lynch from being named U.S. attorney general, but she was confirmed anyway. Lynch, who was born in Greensboro and grew up in Durham, was sworn in in April. She officially became the 83rd Attorney General of the United States and the first African-American woman to hold the position.

### Economics

Winston-Salem residents, especially on the east side, rejoiced when the Liberty Street Market opened in October 2014. It was a sad day, however, when the market closed in late summer of this year.

Jim Shaw, former chairman of the Liberty Community Development Corporation (Liberty CDC, which closed in January), told The Chronicle in September that when Ruben Gonzalez, the city's now retired development project supervisor, approached him with the idea for the market, he thought it was going to be good for Liberty Street. Shaw originally believed Liberty CDC was going to run the market before Mercedes Miller won a bid for it. Shaw said he'd gotten so many calls from vendors

at the time that he had to turn them away. He said he was unsure why it didn't work, but Liberty Street is the worse off for it.

### The Arts

The weeklong National Black Theatre Festival began in 1989. It's held in Winston-Salem every two years. During the celebration this year, a ribbon-cutting ceremony was held at 713 South Marshall St. for a preview of the National Black Theatre Hall of Fame and Museum. Money must be raised to make it a reality. The Hall of Fame and Museum will feature exhibits on the careers of festival founder Larry Leon Hamlin and Mabel P. Robinson, who had a long and distinguished career as a dancer, actor, choreographer, playwright and director. A new group of honorees will be inducted into the hall of fame each year of the festival.

Robinson announced she is retiring today, Dec. 31, from the daily grind of artistic director for the North Carolina Black Repertory Company, which produces the festival.

### The NAACP

The Winston-Salem Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) elected Isaac "Ike" Howard as president. The first election was scheduled in November 2014, but was postponed because the then-president S. Wayne Patterson was concerned that the election needed state officials to monitor it.

The second election was held in January, but it was contested over what was called irregularities.

Howard was elected in May after Patterson dropped out of the race for re-election.

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