

FORUM

Does the pendulum of justice and fairness swing toward black men?

James B. Ewers Jr.

Guest Columnist

Alton Sterling and Philando Castile did not deserve to die. The police shot them both at point blank range.

Sterling, who was shot in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Castile, who was shot in Falcon Heights, Minnesota, were black men who left home thinking they would return home. They didn't.

The police officers involved were white. I mention race because race matters. Dr. Cornell West, a distinguished scholar wrote a book many years ago simply titled, "Race Matters." If you haven't read it, you should as it may give you a perspective on what is happening today.

The circumstances surrounding the deaths of both Alton Sterling and Philando Castile are painful and sad. Alton Sterling was being held down on the ground by two police officers when he was shot while Philando Castile was in his car following police instructions when he was shot.

Both of these horrific acts were caught on video. Having seen both videos, I believe strongly that other methods could have been used to apprehend them. These black men did not deserve to die.

At least in the Louisiana shooting, the Baton Rouge police say they have some additional footage which has not been made public as of yet.

Well, we will have to wait and see about this additional footage. John Bel Edwards, governor of the state of Louisiana held a press conference at a local Baton Rouge church and said that the Department of Justice will be leading the investigation.

Regarding the Minnesota shooting, Philando Castile's fiancée, Diamond Reynolds, captured the entire incident and posted a live Facebook accounting of it. The governor of the state, Mark Dayton, says that the state will lead the investigation. I wouldn't be surprised if he changes his mind in the coming days.

President Obama said that this violence is causing lives to be lost and is America's problem. It does not seem unreasonable for some to say that the relationship between the police and the black community is fractured and getting worse by the minute.

Yes, the vast majority of police officers in America are good people, yet these bad apples in their ranks have made many of us leery and weary.

Try telling Sterling's young son who wept openly at the press conference about the good police officers. Try telling Castile's fiancée about the good police officers. They don't want to hear it. Do you blame them?

If you are the parent of a young black male, how do you explain to them what happened to these two men who are gone too soon?

If you tell them not to run, to be compliant, not to raise their voice, not to make any sudden moves, to say yes sir and no sir and to

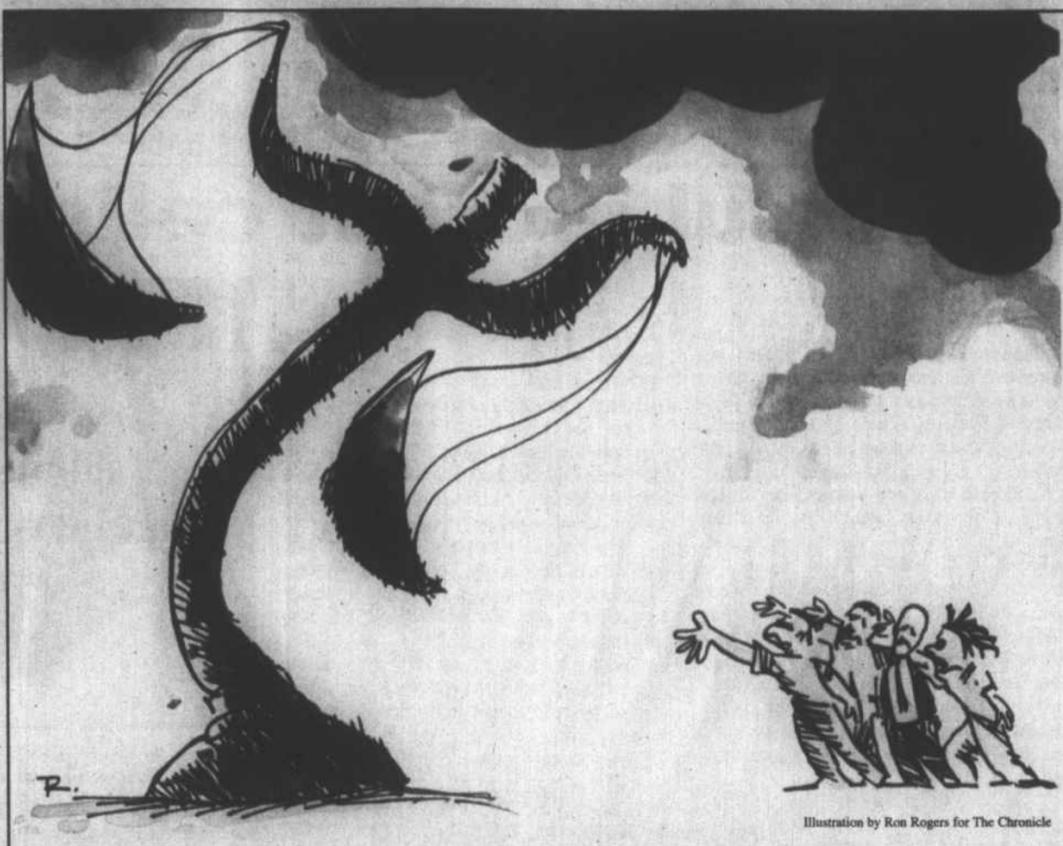


Illustration by Ron Rogers for The Chronicle

follow all police instructions, does that guarantee they won't get shot, maybe even killed? The answer to this question is no, it does not.

So we are really playing Russian Roulette with the lives of our black boys. Black men are also in perilous situations. Just ask Dr. Henry Louis Gates, a Harvard University professor who just a few years ago could not get into his own home in Massachusetts because of police interference.

On more than one occasion, I have said that when an African-American male leaves home in the morning, there is no certainty

that he will return at night. Black men in America seem to be expendable. Have we become so smart, so bold, so confident and so emotionally secure as to pose a threat to the larger society?

I am sick with grief about the number of black men being killed by the police. I have heard the refrain from police, "I feared for my life," which is a credible statement. Alton Sterling had two police officers on top of him, so who feared for whose life?

Back in the day, did the police fear for their lives when they beat Rodney King half to death and it

was all captured on video? By the way, the police were found not guilty in that case.

There is frustration in black communities all across this land. What's going on America when you have some police officers who in an instant can take a life when it is not necessary? What's going on America when police officers harass young black males who are obeying the law?

Police departments must begin to look seriously at how they do police work. Is shooting to kill the only option?

We honor and need law enforcement but we also

need them to be more selective in how they use extreme force.

Alton Sterling and Philando Castile did not deserve to die.

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Don't give rap a bad rap

Carleward Russell
Guest Columnist

Rap is an art form that can be misconstrued by many despite the personal experiences rappers willingly share. So much goes into what rappers say, and it is very likely that those who do not listen to rap will misinterpret their message behind each lyric. Rap becomes more than just words composed into a beat. It is able to convey a deeper meaning by telling stories.

For instance, take one of J. Cole's masterful lyrics, from his song "Never Told":

"Cause Cupid aims and throw the darts, there go the sparks and broken hearts, Who wanna build Noah's Ark just to have that sh*t torn apart?" Some probably do not understand why he swore in the same verse as he made a biblical reference, but that takes away from the true meaning of this line. He means that love can be imperfect, but can also quickly turn into turmoil. Who would want to spend so much time on a relationship just for it to fall

apart in an instant?

Many journals have dedicated time to try and comprehend rap music better. The Journal of Negro Education (Richardson & Scott, 2002) mentions rap music and how it influences many factors. Some of the topics discussed were violence, its influence on youth, and their decisions. As offensive as some lyrics may be perceived by outsiders who have yet to experience African-American culture, the truth is said to be created by a "Black urban youth culture in a troubled world" (Richardson & Scott, 2002). Rappers express their experiences lyrically. Outsiders perceive rapping as, for lack of a better term, "ghetto." One cannot simply blame someone for telling their stories, and expressing it in a culturally artistic format. Some lyrics, however, are merely for entertainment. Today, the use of derogatory slang, such as "hoe" and "b*tch," are filled in rap songs. Of course, the degradation of women in songs and music videos is morally unacceptable and needs to stop. While some may take offense to the slang, it is important to know rappers use words such as these because it has become a social norm. No one has confronted the issue of rappers verbally abusing women.

If this trend continues, this issue will continue to exist.

Adolescents often listen to the uncensored music created by rap stars because they look up to them as role models. The description of sexual encounters are not intended for young children, demonstrating that rap is intended for adults. Despite efforts to censor music, young children still listen, and try to imitate their ways. All in all, no matter the difference in age, race, and gender discrimination, rappers' continued success serves as proof that rap has an unmatched ability to "capture the youth's attention" (Richardson & Scott, 2002, p. 176). Meaning that no matter how much some people may not like it, rappers are always going to have an audience and a following that supports them. Next time you listen to a song, listen for the deeper meaning, because chances are there is one.

Carleward Russell is a rising senior at Reagan High School in Pfafftown, NC, who is attending a summer academic enrichment program at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill named Uplift Plus.

References

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Hanes, Ford call for meeting of black lawmakers on law enforcement training

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

State Sen. Joel Ford (D-Mecklenburg) and State Rep. Ed Hanes Jr. (D-Forsyth) on Monday called for a joint meeting between the Black Legislative Caucus and the law enforcement officials in charge of training and standards for every law enforcement agency in North Carolina.

The meeting would include the various entities, including the N.C. Sheriff's Association, the N.C. Community College system, liaisons from the

Governor's Office, and the N.C. Highway Patrol. The groups would meet with the N.C. Black Legislative Caucus to establish an appropriate paradigm toward improving officer training and preventing situations where deadly force is considered and used.

"We need to have an open dialogue with the law enforcement training staff," said Ford. "The tragic incidents we have witnessed this week in Louisiana, Minnesota and Texas, as well as with the Jonathan Ferrell case right here in Charlotte, showcases the

clear problems we have in our society when it comes to race relations and law enforcement."

Hanes said: "I believe we need to be proactive in North Carolina. We all can talk about leadership and working together, but we need to follow it up. We need to engage in the training procedures that will allow our officers to disengage without having to resort to deadly force."

"I believe if you want to make a difference in how our citizens interact with law enforcement, it must start with a review of

training and standards," said Ford. "If the African-American community wants to impact this process then it must start by having an open, honest dialogue within the community. That must continue not only with the hundreds of law enforcement agencies across the state, but also with the people who train our law enforcement officers."

"I think it would be productive to hear from our sheriffs, our highway patrol, and our local and state law enforcement agencies. We need to

understand how they are training their officers, what they believe needs to change, and what they need in the way of community and State support so that their training positively impacts their ability to protect and serve," Hanes said.

The legislators are currently drafting bi-partisan legislation that will address hiring, screening, and potential misconduct.

"We agree with every officer in the nation who says the vast majority of law enforcement do their jobs the right way," Ford said. "We also understand

that best practices in hiring and firing standards must be continually updated. We want to give them the tools to hire only the best."

"North Carolina can't afford to stand silent while our officers remain under suspicion due to lack of support for culture updating within their ranks," Hanes said. "Senator Ford and I intend to bring communities and political parties together on this issue that must be addressed before tragedy revisits our state."