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After deadly shootings, Obama says police must root out bias

By Josh Lederman

WASHINGTON (AP) - President Barack Obama called on American law enforcement to root out bias in its ranks and said all Americans should be troubled by frequent police shootings of blacks and Hispanics, insisting that fatal incidents in Minnesota and Louisiana are not isolated.

Adding his voice to a growing public outcry, Obama said the shootings were symptoms of a "broader set of racial disparities" in the justice system that aren't being fixed quickly enough.

He ticked through a list of statistics he said showed concerns about bias are real: African-Americans being shot by police or arrested at more than twice the rate of white Americans.

"When incidents like this occur, there's a big chunk of our fellow citizenry that feels as if it's because of the color of their skin, they are not being treated the same," Obama said. "And that hurts. And that should trouble all of us."

Durham Committee Statement on Violence



Omar Beasley, chair of the Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People (DCABP), says members of the organization are "incensed" by the ongoing violence taking place around the country.

That violence includes police shootings and killings of African-Americans in situations such as those last week in Louisiana and Minnesota that prompted nationwide protests, the killing of five police officers and wounding of seven other officers and individuals during a protest in Dallas, and the ongoing violence in African-American and other communities across the country, he said.

"This has got to stop", said Beasley. "We are tired of the bloodshed that is taking the lives of so many people, including young African-American men dying at the hands of each other as well as police officers, and police officers and others being killed in senseless attempts at revenge."

Beasley went on to say that "While the anger, grief and heartache over the events last week remain, we must continue to press for solutions to serious issues rather than turn on each other with fault finding and accusations that do nothing to solve the problems."

The DCABP established a public safety committee chaired by Clarence Birkhead, a former police chief, several months ago to work on these kinds of problems, Beasley noted. Although the committee has not taken a position on the matter yet, part of the problem is the easy availability of assault rifles and other firearms in urban areas. "While the debate over gun control and gun rights continues, I see no reason that civilians need to own assault rifles," he said.

Nationwide and in Durham, Beasley stated, police and other law enforcement officials need to modify and improve training, procedures and the way officers often view and interact with African-American citizens. "We are encouraged that we have a new police chief in Durham who seems to have the background, skills and willingness to make some of the needed changes in policing in Durham," Beasley said, adding that DCABP members will be watching to see not only what she says but what she does as she assumes leadership of the Durham Police Department.

He also said that nationwide and in Durham police need to adopt "sensible use-of-force policies, and institute de-escalation techniques and anger management training for all law enforcement officers." He further advocated greater diversity in the ranks of law enforcement officials, having more officers live in the jurisdictions where they work, and having officers "recommit themselves to the core values of protecting and serving our communities." Finally, he added, the state legislature should enact "sunshine laws" that require public access to police body-cam videos.

African-American citizens in particular, he said, need to stand together to stop the plague of violence within African-American communities.

Obama's diagnosis of the problem reflected a growing sense of frustration and willingness to speak out publicly about police killings despite the risk of making law enforcement officers feel under attack.

The president spoke in a hastily arranged appearance at a hotel in Warsaw just after arriving in Poland for a NATO summit. He largely echoed comments he made earlier in the day in a Facebook post as the two deaths were increasingly capturing the country's attention.

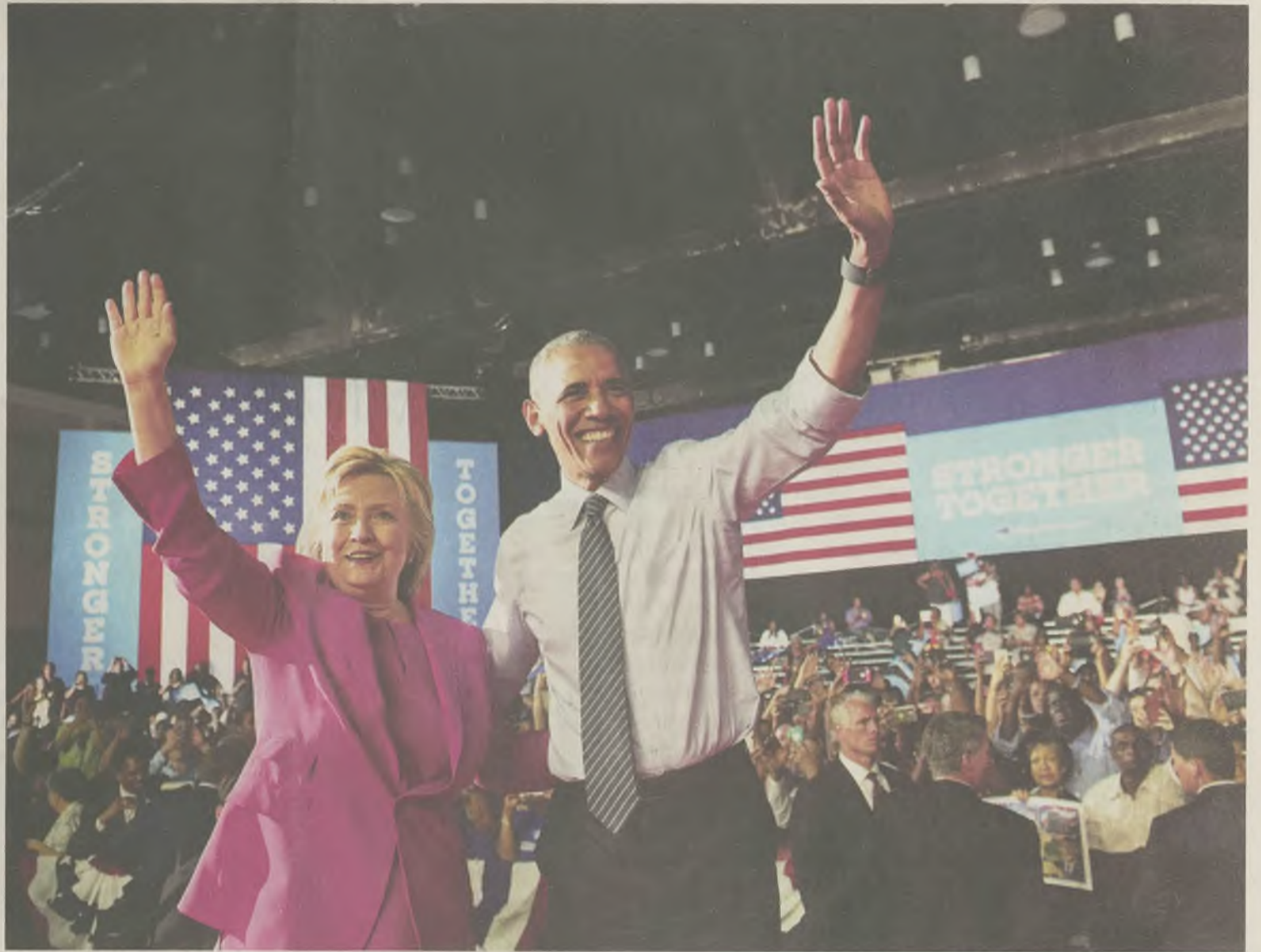
In Louisiana, 37-year-old Alton Sterling was fatally shot Tuesday as he tussled with two white officers outside a convenience store in a predominantly black neighborhood. The shooting was caught on tape and went viral online.

The next day in Minnesota, 32-year-old Philando Castile was shot to death during a traffic stop. His girlfriend posted video of the aftermath live on Facebook, saying he had been shot "for no apparent reason" while reaching for his wallet, as an officer had asked.

Though the White House has sought to avoid commenting on specific cases before all facts are known, in this case Obama weighed in while both shootings are still being investigated, including a civil rights probe by the U.S. Justice Department into the Louisiana incident.

Similar statements about other shootings have stoked tensions with law enforcement, including with FBI Director James Comey, who has suggested the intense public focus on police officers' conduct, fueled by caught-on-camera moments, may be inhibiting officers as they try to protect their communities.

Aiming to pre-empt that concern, Obama said that speaking out about the issue is not an attack on police. He emphasized that he and



President Barack Obama and Presidential nominee Hillary Clinton wave to the crowd in Charlotte July 5. Photo by AP photo by Susan Walsh.

Video shows gruesome aftermath of Minnesota police shooting

By Steve Karnowski and Kyle Potter

FALCON HEIGHTS, Minn. (AP) - A woman who watched as a police officer fatally shot her boyfriend during a traffic stop broadcast the gruesome aftermath of the slaying live on Facebook, telling a worldwide audience that her companion had been shot "for no apparent reason" while reaching for his wallet as the officer had demanded.

Within hours, the Minnesota governor was pressing for the Justice Department to open its second investigation of the week into the death of a black man at the hands of police. The latest shooting happened late Wednesday in the St. Paul suburb of Falcon Heights. In the video, Diamond Reynolds describes being pulled over for a "busted tail light" and says her boyfriend had told the officer he was carrying a gun for which he was licensed.

As word of the shooting spread, relatives of the man joined scores of people who gathered at the scene and outside the hospital where he died. They identified him as Philando Castile of St. Paul, a well-liked 32-year-old cafeteria supervisor at a Montessori school.

Reynolds said Thursday that he was killed even though he complied with the officer's instructions. She told reporters that Castile did "nothing but what the police officer asked of us, which was to put your hands in the air and get your license and registration."

In addition to seeking help from the Justice Department, Gov. Mark Dayton said the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension had opened its own investigation. Speaking to CNN, Castile's mother said that she suspected she would never learn the whole truth about her son's death.

"I think he was just black in the wrong place," Valerie Castile said early Thursday, adding that she had underlined to her children that they must do what authorities tell them to do to survive.

"I know my son ... we know black people have been killed ... I always told them, whatever you do when you get stopped by police, comply, comply, comply."

Police did not release any details about the officer who fired except to say he had been placed on paid administrative leave. Reynolds described him as Asian.

It was the second fatal police shooting this week, coming only days after a black 37-year-old man was killed by officers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Alton Sterling's death was caught on video.

On Wednesday, the Justice Department launched a civil rights investigation into Sterling's shooting, which took place after he scuffled with two white police officers outside a convenience store.

Castile's cousin, Antonio Johnson, told the Star Tribune that because Castile was a black man driving in a largely middle-class suburb, he "was immediately criminally profiled and he lost his life over it."

The site of the shooting in Falcon Heights is close to the Minnesota State Fairgrounds and not far from a clutch of fields associated with the University of Minnesota's agricultural campus.

Late Wednesday, protesters moved to the governor's mansion in nearby St. Paul, where around 200 people chanted and demanded action from Dayton, a Democrat. About 50 protesters stayed through the night.

The video posted Wednesday night on Facebook Live shows the woman in a car next to a bloodied man slumped in a seat. A clearly distraught person who appears to be a police officer stands at the car's window, telling the woman to keep her hands where they are and intermittently swearing.

The interim police chief in nearby St. Anthony, Jon Mangseth, said he was aware of the Facebook video but did not comment on it.

The state Bureau of Criminal Apprehension did not return multiple requests for comment Thursday from The Associated Press.

Facebook Live is a form of internet broadcasting that can be initiated in seconds from the Facebook app. In a few taps, users can send live video straight from their smartphones to friends or to a wider audience.

On the video, the officer tells her to keep her hands up and says: "I told him not to reach for it. I told him to get his hand out."

"You shot four bullets into him, sir. He was just getting his license and registration, sir," the woman responds.

The video goes on to show the woman exiting the car and being handcuffed. A young girl can be seen and is heard saying

at one point, "I'm scared, Mommy."

The woman describes being put in the back seat of the police car and says, "The police just shot my boyfriend for no apparent reason."

It was unclear whether other footage exists. Kim Brazil, the St. Anthony Police Department's office manager, confirmed that their squad cars are equipped with dashboard cameras but said officers do not have body cameras.

A handgun was recovered from the scene, police said.

Castile had worked for the St. Paul school district since he was 19. A principal described him as "a warm person and a gentle spirit" who loved his job and never missed work.

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Black gun owners worried about treatment after shooting

By Jesse J. Holland

WASHINGTON (AP) - One man told an officer during a Minnesota traffic stop that he was a licensed gun owner, and that he was reaching for his wallet, a witness said. The other was on the ground with police officers on top of him in Louisiana when someone shouted "He has a gun!"

Police in each circumstance thought the black man carrying a gun was dangerous and immediately shot him dead. Activists say black gun owners are often treated differently than white gun owners to a sometimes fatal degree.

The perception of an armed black person has not changed much since the days of slave rebellions, said the Rev. Kenn Blanchard, a former firearms instructor who runs BlackManWithAGun.com.

"If you have a firearm or you scare the wrong people, you're going to get shot. You're going to get killed. The perception of the scary black man still exists. The threat of the slave going rogue, it's still there. The bad gangbanger," Blanchard said.

A sniper opened fire on police officers in the heart of Dallas, July 7, killing five officers and injuring six others during protests over two recent fatal police shootings of black men, according to police.

The gunfire broke while hundreds of people were gathered to protest fatal police shootings this week in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and suburban St. Paul, Minnesota.

Police wrongly identified a black gun owner among the protesters as a suspect. The Dallas Police Department put out a photo on its Twitter account late July 7 of a man wearing a camouflage shirt and holding a rifle with the message: "This is one of our suspects. Please help us find him!" The tweet remained on the account early July 8.

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