

Short Communication

A Tale of Two Cities – A Contrast in Righteous Reckoning between Black and White? A Perspective in Duality

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This timely editorial describes to very different human experiences with law enforcement; references some trend data concerning a human condition; introduces a framework for critical examination of recent incidents, and hopefully captures all of these dimensions within a metaphorical context of addressing societal challenges “in between” and “either or”. The authors (African American and Caucasian) were comparing their respective lifetime experiences with police stops in California and New York, two rather progressive states. The consistent and dramatic contrast in their vehicular experiences triggered this editorial perspective. We will not go into the recent troubling, unsettling, and disturbing events between African American men and police – only to point out that Philando Castille was pulled over 52 times prior to his untimely tragic death, which does pose intriguing questions about racial profiling, preemptive behavior, predisposition to vulnerability, and propensity of the need for deeper critical examination by law enforcement and local communities.

Introduction

Related to this editorial, the somewhat assertive driving habits of the Caucasian author (who will remain nameless) provided numerous opportunities for interaction with law enforcement over the years – as well as opportunities for remedial training in driving school. Although accident free and with an apparently excellent driving record thanks to the utility of traffic school, it was possible to amass disproportionate and unintentional exposure to law enforcement in the Caucasian community. The other African American co-author has advocated for years that “social justice is the righteous reckoning of balance between either and or” (speech at the University of Michigan). It is hoped that this metaphor is made clear from this editorial and critical examination exploration between Black and White, automobile drivers and academic drivers for positive change, and the human choice of either or.

In fairness to the police in these and related instances, a study by Rosenbaum, et al. [1] in *Police Quarterly*, suggested that “encounters with the police can be conditioned by prior attitudes about the police rather than the other way around [2].” (p.360) The authors also noted that a citizen’s previous attitudes about the police was an essential determinant in forming their judgments about subsequent experiences -- and future attitudes towards the police.

Not surprisingly, according to Newport [3], combined Gallup data from its annual update of confidence in institutions for 2014, 2015 & 2016, reflected that 58% of whites have confidence in the police, compared with 29% of blacks. Similarly, 67% of Blacks thought they were treated more poorly than Whites by police in their communities in 2016, while only 40% of Whites felt that way about the treatment of Blacks in their communities – although that percentage rose from 34% of Whites feeling that way in 2015.

The White City

The overall experiences were universally professional and rather

impressive. There was never an instance of raised voices, threats, or a drawn weapon. Each interaction concluded with something akin to “have a nice day” from the officer and – when the author was able to talk his way out of a ticket – sincere gratitude and thanks. On a number of occasions, the officer elected to turn the law enforcement activity into a learning experience for the driver.

Radar gun operation

In one memorable event, in which the author was stopped for speeding in the Hollywood Hills, the LAPD motorcycle officer, who was using a radar gun, felt compelled to explain the operation of the gun with more detail than was required at the moment in writing a ticket. What ensued was a very graphic demonstration of mobile radar technology. Quite impressive actually. In all candor, the trigger for the elaborate explanation may have been a not so innocuous question regarding the calibration of the radar gun. This was a technique informally acquired in traffic school (secondary gain, we suppose) in order to challenge the accuracy of the radar gun in traffic court*.

In fairness, an article by Frank, et al. [1] “author’s” positive experience may have been caused by the police officer’s assumption that he was a homeowner with a large income because of the location in which he was stopped. Furthermore it was assumed by the police officer that he was highly educated because he asked a question regarding the calibration of the radar gun. Proving the theory that homeowners, higher educated respondents, and those with higher incomes may have more favorable attitudes with police officers.

Safe highway merging lesson

In another instance, a California Highway Patrol (CHP) officer elected to explain and demonstrate the safe way to merge back onto a highway from the shoulder after the author had been signaled to pull over for speeding. The officer helpfully explained that because there was not enough open space in front of us on the shoulder to come up to the proper speed before re-entering the moving traffic lane, he

would back his car up to allow adequate acceleration. He suggested that I watch him and do the same thing, following in his trail. He hit his emergency lights to create a buffer, to make it safer for me to follow safely.

A Ride in a police car for fun

Back in New York, a police officer who stopped the author for making a “California Stop” (slowing down rather than fully stopping -- for those readers who don’t spend sufficient time in traffic school to be familiar with the term) ended the incident (without a ticket) by offering to take the author for part of a midnight shift in a patrol vehicle. The offer was accepted and a lasting friendship developed.

The vigilante professor

In another scarier New York incident, the author, while a Professor at Baruch College of the City University of New York, called the police after witnessing someone attempting to break into a neighbor’s apartment. Because the response time was slow, the not-so-clever author decided to detain the suspect – at gunpoint – until the police arrived. Fortunately for everyone, the suspect ran back to the elevator and headed down to the lobby to make his escape. The police grabbed him in the lobby and brought him back up to the scene of the (attempted) crime, where the author was still waiting with a gun. The exact words from one of the officers, whose weapons had already been holstered after the suspect was in handcuffs: “You can put the gun down now, son, I’m sure you have a license for it. Why don’t you step back into your apartment and we’ll interview you in a couple of minutes?” That was it. They never even asked to see the Concealed Weapons Permit (CWP) which was current. Instead, they complimented the author on his public spirited “guts”-- which his father more aptly characterized as “amazing stupidity”?

White bottom line

The authors believe the aforementioned incidents convey the not atypical experiences of most Caucasians with the police. For most similarly situated individuals, it is a relatively positive experience, even when they are being ticketed for violations. Many such individuals were brought up by parents who taught their children, with justification, that police are to be trusted and police are their friends.

The racial disconnect

But there is a racial disconnect in our tale of two cities. The African American community has not been brought up by parents who could not candidly assure them that police are to be trusted and police are their friends. The motto of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) “To Protect and to Serve” may not apply equally to all racial groups throughout that community, between Blacks and Whites, and across our accelerating diverse nation.

The black City

Sadly, responsible, concerned and protective African American parents, up to and including the President of the United States, have had to hold uneasy conversations with their children as to how to act and protect themselves from the police, particularly while driving. African American males in particular, are often coached to raise their hands and spread their fingers when approached by a police officer, even when they have done nothing wrong and are not accused of doing anything wrong. This would be an unimaginable conversation

for Caucasian parents to have with their children. The human feeling of mental stress, physical violation, and personal insult or embarrassment that anyone goes through at the airport from security check points -- especially when they are “randomly selected” -- is the same human feeling that many, if not most, African American men experience every day from various stations, spaces and stages in life. It has been estimated that most African American men will be pulled over before their early twenties. Let’s consider the following societal backdrop cited in *The Guardian* by George Younge (January, 24, 2014) ... almost 50% of black men in the United States under the age of 23 have been arrested; that’s roughly the same percentage as black boys who fail to graduate with their appropriate year group. Meanwhile, almost one in 10 young black men are behind bars. Born in the poorest areas, herded into the worst schools, policed, judged and sentenced in the most discriminatory fashion, by the time African American men reach manhood the odds have been heavily stacked against them... “In research terms used in social and behavioral sciences, we call this “phenomenological lived experiences” and there is sociological rationale and psychological reasoning to believe that these lived experiences do, in fact, have a profound impact on the long-term, lasting and lifetime mental health of African American male infants, children, youth and adults. Perhaps the subsequent tragedy from the incidents in St Paul/Twin Cities, Minnesota and Baton Rouge, Louisiana with the African American male assassin in Dallas, Texas exemplifies this point. The above observations by Younge followed other earlier observations in perhaps a “larger sub textual backdrop” in the February 15, 2013 issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

“A report published last year by the University of Pennsylvania documents the crisis facing black men in higher education, and warns that things are getting worse. According to the report, the relative number of black men entering college hasn’t improved since 1976, and only 33 percent of black male college students graduate within six years... Undoubtedly, the difficulties black men face on college campuses can be traced to the failure of elementary and secondary schools to engage black boys. As the College Board reports, black boys are unfairly singled out for punishment, and find themselves suspended and expelled at rates twice that of their white peers. When black boys aren’t “tracked out” of school and into prison, too often they are “tracked inside” of school, segregated in special-education or remedial courses that are unlikely to inspire or prepare them for college”.

What, why and where are the racial comparisons, economic contrasts and social contracts between Black and White, automobile drivers and academic drivers for positive change, and the human choices between either or? All of these sub textual and contextual observations had a profound effect on both these concerned editorial writers. In the contrast to the Caucasian co-author, the African American writer has also lived in the progressive states on California and New York, as well as culturally contemporary Miami, Florida and other cities in the Deep South. In addition to witnessing the above negative observations concerning African American men in the educational system, over the period of four decades, his vehicular experiences with the police have been predominately negative in nature, not to mention other incidents that were experienced in non-vehicular settings, like higher education.

Despite the remedial training in driving school with a good driving record, there was both disproportionate and differential treatment compared to the other author during exposures, interactions, and engagements with law enforcement. In contrast, the overall experiences were generally integrated with behaviors by law enforcement that fit within one or two of the following behavioral and sociological categories: implicit bias**, micro aggressions, and passive aggressiveness. There were no instances of threats or drawn weapons but the language and verbal communications could have been categorized from the above three areas – and could have provoked a younger African American to say or do something foolish after being enticed, becoming defensive, getting emotive and getting behaviorally ignited to a level of human intensity. This, of course, could result in unfortunate consequences and inevitable circumstances for both the automobile driver and the police officer. The term “have a nice day” was used a couple of times with the African American writer but it appeared to be with a tone of indirect sarcasm, subtle hostility and hidden resentment.

Over recent years, this type of resentment became more apparent and got more frequent, amplified, and pronounced following the election of the first African American U.S. President. Moreover, there were no occasions with a police officer turning the enforcement activity into a positive learning experience, explaining the operation of a radar gun with detail about the calibration of the radar gun, the accuracy of the radar gun in a judicial setting, explaining the safe way to merge back onto a highway from the shoulder or an explanation about adequate vehicle acceleration. Most conversations about any kind of gun has been about applying amendment rights for gun owners to protect themselves, interestingly, from other law abiding gun owners. However, the African American writer has developed lasting friendships over the years with several police officers, district attorneys, forensic psychologists, public defenders, judges, and others in the criminal justice and jurisprudence system. These relationships are sparked yet nurtured from conversations about the increasingly growing incidents between African American men and law enforcement.

But the conversations are too often guided by what has happened “afterwards” with families, neighborhoods and communities as the result of the actions taken by the police and the African American males and not enough conversation about what could be proactively done “before wards” as our dividing society faces widespread turmoil, divisiveness, friction, chaos and unrest in communities. It may be that by developing behavioral patterns, policies, protocols and practices before these unfortunate events manifest, society can be more empowered to more proactive, preventative and anticipatory during not only vehicle incidents but home break-in incidents and others too. We need to get the point of critical examination as to why on one hand a Caucasian is told, “You can put the gun down now, son, I’m sure you have a license for it”; and on the other hand an African American is shot to death after amicably admitting he had a licensed gun and demonstrating full cooperation for all of society to now witness from generated social media. Now social media enthusiasts and others in society must confront, participate and internalize the difficult heart breaking and heart wrenching process of balancing the righteous reckoning between Black and White, either and or, and the legal right for some to bear arms and not for others-- under the same

constitutional amendment.

Black Bottom Line and Conclusion

We know that many, not all, of our young African American men of color are faced with the daily challenges of feeling wayward, unsure, misguided, confused, and sometimes angry. This the case for African American drivers as well as professors. While many of the situations African American men find themselves in are often beyond their personal control, we hope that our editorial can serve as a scholarly conduit for deeper critical examinations of their situations, their life circumstances, and their other everyday vulnerable diversions. It will require another lengthier editorial to discuss the devastating effects of “diversion” and its impact on social injustice. As concerned professors, we stand firmly in our admittedly altruistic belief that, in most cases, the higher level of college degree attainment, the more likely access our young African American men will have to choices, freedoms, alternatives, liberties, liberations, emancipation, opportunities, the pursuit of happiness, and openings to the “American Dream.”(In this regard, a framework for aiding readers and families in college education planning in introduced in Empowerful Informatics by Academica Press).

The process of critical thinking from the forthcoming framework is central to the clarification, coherence, and clarity of everyday diversion analysis and vulnerabilities between law enforcement and the community. All of us are beings in an interconnected human community with varying “in betweens” and differing “lived experiences” – somewhere between circumstance and opportunity; problem and solution; cause and effect; the police and the community; crisis and circumstance; and questions and answers is the manifestation of resolve, of result, of renewal, and renaissance for the greatest of human good.

- From the critical examinations, there will be uncomfortable analyses about bigotry, prejudice, antagonism, harassment, mistreatment, hatred, stereotyping, misfortunes, poor judgment, close calls, missed calls, humiliation, misinterpretations, false accusations, lessons to be learned and, of course, racism. In framing this editorial from the very beginning, we continue to have the utmost confidence in the human spirit of African American men from their incredible inner strength and untapped capability; their enduring perseverance and sustainable stamina; and the remarkable promise form their gifted resilience. But like police officers, they be with treated with human dignity, interpersonal decency, legal fairness, mutual-relational respect, and social justice. We encourage our readers to apply the following framework during these critical examinations of community incidents and events between law enforcement and local communities by:

- learning how to differentiate between fact and fiction,
- recognizing and assessing societal bias and rhetoric,
- determining accuracy, evidence and completeness of information and data,
- recognizing illogical fallacies, nonsense, myth, and faulty reasoning,
- balancing emotions in times of confrontation, confusion, and conflict,

- comparing, connecting, and contrasting balanced points of view from data,
- making sound judgments and not drawing inconclusive conclusions,
- integrating, aggregating, and synthesizing information and data,
- clarifying questions before determining alternative answers, and
- rising above others' "diversions" and seeking truth
- focusing on "before wards", the human spirit, and the bigger picture

In circling back to our beginning, and in recognizing the above advocacy for fact finding, we should note that Mr. Castille's previous citations ranged from driving without a muffler to not wearing a seat belt. Instead of addressing this human tragedy in this editorial, we ask readers to visit the below websites to conduct their own reflective analysis and critical examination against our above suggested culminating framework.

- <http://mappingpoliceviolence.org/aboutthedata/>

- <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/dec/31/the-counted-police-killings-2015-young-black-men>
- https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/study-finds-police-fatally-shoot-unarmed-black-men-at-disproportionate-rates/2016/04/06/e494563e-fa74-11e5-80e4-c381214de1a3_story.html

Other Recommendations for our Readers

*Fast driving readers may elect to acquire the recommended methodology through a variety of internet sources, but results are not guaranteed. And the authors certainly do not encourage unsafe driving!

References

1. Brandl SG, Frank J, Worden RE, Bynum TS. Global and specific attitudes toward the police: Disentangling the relationship. *Justice Quarterly*. 1994; 11: 119-134.
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