

THE UNDERLYING CAUSES OF WHY POLICE AND, OTHERS SHOOT UNARMED YOUNG BLACK MEN

Unarmed young black men are frequently shot because of a well documented perception by white people that they are prone to violent criminal behavior.

LAS VEGAS, NEVADA, UNITED STATES, May 15, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- WHY ARE UNARMED YOUNG BLACK MEN FREQUENTLY SHOT?

By Jack Levine

A frank discussion on why unarmed young black men are frequently shot, is long overdue. Unfortunately, instead of blatant racial prejudices being the cause, scientific research studies indicate that the root cause of this phenomenon is the perception that there is an association between African Americans and violent criminal behavior. If so, this frequently translates into an instinctual fear on the part of many whites, including police officers, that is generated by a distorted assessment of the threat posed to them when confronting a young black man.

This fear is not entirely without some statistical justification. While blacks only comprise 13% of the U.S. population, they comprise 29% of those arrested for violent crimes.¹ In black neighborhoods, homicide is the most common cause of death for African-American men aged 15 to 34.² As a result of these statistics, many white Americans strongly associate violent crime with African-Americans. ³

In 1993, the Rev. Jesse Jackson reportedly once told a Chicago audience, "there is nothing more painful to me at this stage in my life than to walk down the street and hear footsteps and start thinking about robbery -- then look around and see somebody white and feel relieved." Is this implicit bias, rationally based and, does it directly affect how the public, including police officers, evaluate ambiguous, and potentially threatening scenarios when confronting young black men? If this bias does, in fact, have a reasonable basis, it is understandable why, in so many incidences, police officers and, others have over-reacted and jumped to erroneous conclusions in assessing whether an African American suspect is armed, or not.

Scientific studies have demonstrated why this is so.⁴ In these studies, white college students were shown images of either a black man or a white man and asked to identify whether an object being held was a gun, or some other object. The studies demonstrated a marked reduction in accuracy on the part of the participating white students, causing them to mistake ordinary objects for guns, when shown a black face and, some other object, when shown a white

face.

This study may explain the March 2018 Sacramento police shooting which occurred at night, with limited visibility, in which a 22-year-old African American, Stephon Clark, was killed. Clark, was seen by surveillance cameras breaking into at least three vehicles and a neighbor's home. When confronted by two police officers, Clark was instructed: "Show me your hands." At that moment, Clark was merely holding a cell phone in his hand, which was mistakenly perceived as a weapon by the police officers.

Furthermore, it is unlikely that racial bias training for police officers, by itself, will have any effect on the perception that there is a correlation between violent criminal behavior and young black men. Studies conducted on the incarceration of African Americans convicted of various crimes, support this correlation. In 2014, a study conducted by the NAACP showed that African Americans, who make up only 12% of the general population, constituted 34% of the nation's prison population, a rate more than five (5) times that of whites.⁵ Although this disparity may be accounted for by the racial prejudices that may exist in our criminal justice system, the only way to change this perception of a correlation between crime and African-Americans, is for the black community to undertake a major effort to institute cultural change. Perhaps, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. pointed the way in his "I Have a Dream Speech": "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."

Social scientists believe that building character, begins at an early age by children adopting their parents as role models, with fathers being the principal role model for male children. With 77% of African American children born out-of-wedlock and, raised only by their mothers,⁶ the opportunities to develop good character are thereby greatly reduced. Instead, young black males, raised in single parent homes, may by default, look to street gangs as models to fill the void left by absent fathers.

Because of what appears to be a tolerance in the black community for black fathers abandoning their children, this cultural tradition must change if we are to eliminate the unfortunate perception of a correlation between young African-American males and criminal or violent behavior.

Although few would doubt that pockets of racial prejudice still exist in America, perhaps it is time that the African-American community looks inwardly, as well as outwardly to identify the sources of racial prejudice and, their inability to achieve their goals of economic and social equality. Perhaps the leaders of our black communities should organize neighborhood meetings to stimulate discussion on these issues and try to understand the real reasons for some of the perceptions that large portions of the white community have unfortunately developed.

If these measures are undertaken, when Black Lives Matter organizes their next demonstration, instead of angrily chanting slogans vilifying the police, they should, perhaps consider marching

through our inner cities with messages on their banners and signs: "We have met the enemy, and they are us?"

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