

Understanding Helps to End Race Wars

I don't remember too much about the day that I got the call that my uncle, Mannix Franklin, Sr. had been killed because I think I was too numb to even allow the events of that day to commit themselves to long-term memory. What I can remember about that day, however, was the sound of my mother wailing on the other end of the telephone line. "They killed him," she said. "They killed Mannix." Who? My heart started racing. Who in the world would want to kill Uncle Mannix? After all, Mannix wasn't an aggressive man; he was a gentle soul. Out of all of his siblings, he was the quieter one, the one who seemed to fade into the background. How could anyone want to kill him? Mannix was the type of man who would walk away from a fight. He was the kind of guy that if someone pushed him down, he'd get up and walk away. He didn't like fighting, and in my twenty plus years of living, I had never seen him get into a fight with anyone.

Mannix was the youngest of my grandmother's seven children, and of course, being the youngest, he was the one my grandmother doted over. Nevertheless, he hadn't been the best judge of character in the dating world, and it was his lack of discernment that would ultimately cost him his life.

October 31, 2003 was the day that a cop drew his gun and shot my uncle five times. Mannix lived in Milwaukee, Wisconsin with his wife and their children, and on that fateful day, his wife had called the police because she and Mannix had an argument and he refused to leave their home. Mannix was allegedly intoxicated and he and his wife had been arguing when she asked him to leave. Mannix refused to leave the house, so his wife called the police. When the police arrived, the report alleged that Mannix was hiding behind a trash can outside, and he emerged with one hand in his pocket. The officer who took the call claimed that he'd asked my uncle to show his hands, but my uncle didn't comply. Instead, the officer alleged that Mannix continued to approach him despite his commands that he stop and show his hands, and when he failed to comply, the officer shot him five times. Mannix was then taken to the hospital where he died. Of course, my uncle was a black man and his killer was white, and it goes without saying that most people believed the killing was racially motivated.

I've always had my thoughts about racially motivated killings and what I've come to believe is not all white officers who kill black men murder them because they hate black skin. Many Caucasian officers who kill black men do so because they fear black men, and this fear isn't necessarily derived from a superiority complex, but I believe it is derived from ignorance. Of course, this ignorance was homegrown. Many of these officers were raised in predominantly white neighborhoods and grew up in families that steered clear of anyone who didn't look like themselves. They went to all-white schools and their parents shared their fears of black people with them. They grew up believing that black men were predisposed to violence because they didn't get that much exposure to African Americans, and what little knowledge they did receive about "some" African American men was what they'd heard on the news or from their parents. Nevertheless, many of these men grew up dreaming about the day

they'd become police officers. They didn't realize that the profession they dreamed of entering would expose them to a world that their parents had purposely kept them away from. Their ignorance was generational, and it was that ignorance that would cost so many black men their lives. Once they were given those guns and the legal right to use those guns, many of these officers were sent into neighborhoods and amongst the very people they'd grown up fearing. This means they had sheltered upbringings and absolutely no training, and this was the recipe for certain disaster. And then, it happened. One day, they got calls about black men who were allegedly breaking the law. Once they arrived on the scenes and couldn't get those men to obey their commands, they felt justified in taking their lives, but not because the men were breaking the laws of the state. They killed them because they were ignorant and fearful and those men were breaking their own personal laws which demanded that every minority man was to either submit or die. These personal laws were created out of the fear of minorities, especially minorities living in urban areas. Of course, Caucasian officers who grew up in African American communities are less likely to kill unarmed black men than the ones who grew up in predominantly white communities.

Anytime you fear something, you will overkill it. For example, I don't like spiders, and anytime I'm faced with one, I have to make sure it's dead. The reason I overkill spiders is I don't know a whole lot about them, but what I do know is that some of them can bite humans and some of those bites can be life-threatening. Since I don't know too much about spiders, I can't tell you which ones are venomous or which ones are non-venomous, so any spiders who come into my "personal space" will be killed. I don't hate spiders; after all, I wouldn't go out of my way to kill one. I just don't want them coming anywhere near me. That's how some officers are about minorities. When that officer shot my uncle five times, his intention was to kill him because my uncle went outside of the officer's comfort zone and was in the perimeters of what the officer consider his "personal space". His intention wasn't to disarm him, even though my uncle was unarmed. His intention wasn't to maim him. He wanted to kill him because my uncle was not obeying him. One of his bullets landed in Mannix's head. I often asked the question, "Why didn't he just shoot him in the leg or the arm if he thought Mannix could have possibly had a weapon?" But the answer is evident. He wanted to kill Mannix because Mannix was not obeying his personal laws. He had a gun, a badge, and he knew the state would back him if he had a justifiable argument.

In March of 2008, I got married in a small, quaint town in Denmark by the name of Maribo. When my ex and I were planning our wedding, I'd told him that I wanted to spend a few hours in Denmark before returning to Germany where he was living. Of course, I wanted to walk around the city and take a few pictures here and there, so he'd chosen a return ticket that would allow us seven hours to walk around before we had to take our train back. I didn't realize it would be the longest seven hours of my life. After we'd said our vows in the local courthouse, we ventured outside with our cameras in tow. We were close to the downtown area, so we decided to walk around and check out the place. We hadn't been walking a few minutes before we realized that Maribo wasn't like many of the places we'd visited

in Europe. People were staring and pointing at us, and it was obvious that they were staring at us because we were black. This didn't mean they were racist; they simply hadn't seen too many Blacks in their small city. It goes without saying, we were extremely uncomfortable.

The sound of a church bell ringing got our attention, so we followed the sound and found ourselves on the grounds of a local catholic church. Behind the church was a small lake, so we decided to hang out in front of the lake for a few minutes. Just as we started to approach the lake, we caught sight of a group of children who were pointing at us and speaking loudly and excitedly in Danish. Neither of us could speak Danish, so we stood still as the children raced over towards us. They were about three and four years old, and there were probably around ten or more children. The children were gorgeous and their innocence was evident. They stared at us in amazement, pointing and greeting us with their little hands. We weren't in the slightest bit offended because they were children, plus, we'd seen the reactions of a few adults in that town, so it was obvious that they had never seen black people up close. As we stood there smiling and waving at the children, their teachers hurriedly raced over towards us and began to speak Danish to us, but I told them that we spoke English, and to my surprise, they began to speak in English. "I'm sorry," said one of the women. "They're just...um..." She stopped mid-sentence. She didn't want to say the wrong thing, so she searched for the words to describe the children's behavior. "They've never seen black people before," I said pointing at the skin on my arm. Seeing that I wasn't bothered, I could see her relax a little as she said yes and nodded her head in affirmation. "It's okay," I said as I continued to smile and greet the children. After all, I knew that if I had never seen a white person or any person who didn't look like myself when I was a child, I would have likely had the same reaction. My ex and I stood still and continued to smile at the children as their teachers ushered them away from us still apologizing. What's the point of this story? Those children were innocent children who'd likely never seen a black person before. They weren't racist; they were simply unexposed to other cultures and people. As they get older, their opinions about Blacks will begin to form, and those opinions will be shaped by their parents and the people they're closest to. If they aren't given the proper exposure and introduction to people of color, they could grow up, become police officers and shoot unarmed men, but not because they are racist. They'd kill those men because of their lack of diversity and their prejudices. Please know that the word "prejudice" means to prejudge, and even though we've given it racist undertones, some people prejudge others because of their ignorance of those people and their preconceived notions of certain minorities. This means that even if we regard them as racist, the reality is their racism isn't formed in hatred; it's formed in ignorance, or, in better terms, lack of knowledge.

It goes without saying that a lot of officers do kill black men because they hate black men, and I'm happy that today's technology is helping to expose these characters, nevertheless, I believe we have to be careful when judging a situation because if we give the wrong label to a situation, we run the risk of losing our voices. I'm not sure what label the officer who killed my uncle should wear. Was he a hateful racist man who'd gotten an opportunity to kill someone whose skin he so hated? Or was he an

ignorant prejudiced man who was given a gun and a badge without being given the proper exposure and education he'd need to effectively protect and serve the people? That's a question I may never have the answer to, but what I do know is that hating him would not benefit me at all. I forgave him a long time ago because I am not his judge; God is. One day, he has to stand before the Lord and if he doesn't repent, he will be judged and punished, nevertheless, my hope is that he will repent because the truth is regardless of what he's done, God loves him. Was I angry with him for killing the man who'd jokingly call me "Biff Reager" when I was growing up? Yes..of course. But I've come to understand that it is not my job to search his heart because the heart is so well hidden that even the sharpest of men can't truly know it. What I've come to believe is that the government should start putting our tax dollars to good use by making sure that every officer of every color is exposed to people and communities that they wouldn't ordinarily venture into. Some of those officers need a positive view of black men, especially black men who they believe to be threats. When Trayvon Martin was killed, so many people tried to justify George Zimmerman killing him because they said Trayvon looked threatening. He wore a hoodie, and in their minds, this hoodie gave Zimmerman the right to kill him, but what they were saying was they fear black men in hoodies. To them, black men who wore hoodies are the proverbial spiders who look threatening, and even though all black men who wear hoodies aren't criminals, they feel that it's okay to kill them because they don't know the difference between a threatening or non-threatening black man, especially if he looks like their idea of a criminal.

I believe that this nation needs to come together and address racism at its roots, and most of the time, racism is rooted in ignorance, and again, ignorance leads to prejudice. Rather than having race wars and divides, the good people (of all races) of this country should ban together against those who are evil (of all races) because that's the war we're really fighting. It's not a war against flesh and blood as so many have come to believe. Satan uses lack of knowledge (ignorance) to destroy people and the way we combat this is by getting the knowledge we need to move forward. I truly believe that if we all stood together as a people and put pressure on our city, state and federal officials to properly train and educate the officers they give guns to, and we put pressure on them to effectively arrest and prosecute the officers who kill simply because they can kill someone, we'd see more officer convictions, less killings, and a greater united front in this nation.

The killing of my uncle was ruled a justifiable homicide and the officer was cleared of all charges, but he was later arrested for punching out an unarmed man. He'd chased the man and when he'd got caught up with him, he'd punched him and knocked him unconscious. The man was sitting down when the officer caught up with him. I believe this pretty much says a lot about his temper and his character, but not all officers are like him. We need to put more pressure on our state officials to make sure that the people they hire are given the proper education and exposure before they are handed badges and guns, and then, released into communities frequented by minorities. This isn't something Blacks ought to do; this is something Blacks, Whites, Latinos, and people of all races should do. When we ban together, the unjustified killings will begin to decline because the hateful and the fearful will know that they

won't have a race or group of people to back them up when they do wrong. Instead, they will have to face “the people” this nation claims to be for. At the same time, I hear people often say that hateful racists like George Zimmerman have gotten away with murder, and my response is always, “They got away from man, but they didn't get away from God.” People who never confess their sins, justify their sins, and when they justify them, they repeat them. This means that they often become high-minded, narcissistic, egotistical, and they start to feel untouchable. It is then that the long arm of the Lord reaches out and pulls them down. “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18).