

Justin: Alright, welcome the first episode of the power of three podcast today we are going to be talking about police and community relations.

Geoff: Today we are going to be discussing three main topics including an interview. Let's get started of by introducing our speakers. My name is Jeff

Sean: Sean

Justin: Justin

Zach: I'm Zach, and we got J-Rod in the back editing it out.

Sean: And without further ado, let's get started.

Topic 1

Justin: Recently there have been a lot of stories in the news about police violence. I mean it seems like every week it's in the headlines. With all this exposure we start to get use to it. A lot of people are starting to graze over those headlines and that's not always good. So right now we are going to take a deeper look at a specific example to try to figure out what's actually going on. That example is the shooting of Timothy Russell and Malissa Williams in Cleveland, Ohio. On November 29, 2012 Timothy was driving his '79 light-blue Chevy Malibu with Melissa in the passenger seat when a police officer spotted them in an area known for drug deals. When the officer tried to pull them over for a turn signal violation they kept driving which started a chase. During the chase Timothy drove past a couple of officers who said they heard gun fire. (Later after the chase they found out that it was just backfire from the car, but this did a good job of putting the officers on high alert). The chase went on for 22 miles at which point Timothy pulled into the parking lot of Heritage Middle School. Because of the fear that they were armed one officer opened fire and the rest of the officers followed in the shooting. 137 shots were fired at the two in the car. Russell was hit 23 times and Williams was hit 24. They both died as a result. Once the news reached the town that two unarmed black motorist were shot dead by a group of police officers many in the town were outraged. Protest quickly broke out and during those protest 71 people were arrested. The events of that day and the days to follow were heavily influenced by the damaged relationship between the police and there community.

Justin: Well the first thing we got to figure out in this instance is if the police officers were justified

Zach: I don't know, I don't think they were justified to just shoot the car. I mean they didn't do anything to warrant that type of reaction. It doesn't say they showed a gun, they didn't have a gun on them obviously, and they hadn't even gotten out of the car. And they just opened fire. I think they are definitely at fault in this situation.

Justin: Yeah, the cop heavily outnumbered the two in the car. When I come in and look at it I almost see it as something really unfortunate, because with the car backfiring and all the things that transpired to that point, the cops were concerned that there was a gun in the car. If they

had a second thought someone could have died. They were being preemptive. That's both sides of the story but in this instance I think the cops...

Zach: Yeah but it wasn't confirmed gun shots. I don't know it's too many variables for me to think they can go directly into firing

Geoff: I feel as tho the cops were not fully justified to move in under the circumstances they were currently under. They had no proof they were any danger to anyone.

Zach: Yeah they were just running away. They were being pulled over and it was just a car chase. You don't know they could just have no insurance. I mean that's probably not the case but...

Justin: The police and everyone that did the investigation talked to the friends of the two that were shot and they said they were most likely there for a drug deal. But after 22 miles the cops had some reason to assume they were dangerous people. And they were reaching speeds of over 100 miles per hour.

Topic 2

Sean: Next up we'll listen to a recorded interview between host of NPR, Audie Cornish, and former NYPD sergeant Noel Leader. Block first asks questions based on President Obama's quote from December 3rd last year:

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA: We are not going to let up until we see a strengthening of the trust and a strengthening of the accountability that exists between our communities and our law enforcement.

Sean: That was a statement given shortly after the deaths of Garner, Michael Brown and others. She then continues on to ask him more questions on as to why there is a strained relation between the community and law enforcement. Let's take a listen.

Our next guest has given a lot of thought to what police are doing right and wrong and what they can do better. He's retired New York Police Department sergeant Noel Leader. He served in the NYPD for more than 20 years, and he's the founder of 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement Who Care. I asked Mr. Leader if he had the president's ear this week, what he would say to him or to Attorney General Holder that would help gain trust and accountability.

NOEL LEADER: Well, I would encourage them to not only give wordplay to this problem which has been systemic during both of their tenures, but to be honest and sincere about making local police departments accountable to their citizens. And he has the power - the presidency - he has the highest prosecutor in the country. So he can put some pressure to make sure that he forces police departments throughout the country to actually make certain that they're protecting their citizens according to the law.

CORNISH: Now, you do have an insider's view of the relationship between the district attorney and the police, and you've been critical of it. And, you know, can you talk a little bit more about

that relationship and how it can be problematic when it comes to investigating questionable police actions?

LEADER: Well, because of the incestuous relationship between the district attorney's office and the police - you know, they work hand-in-hand every day on every - practically every criminal case. Police officers are evolved - involved, and they work hand-in-hand with the district attorney. Therefore, our organization, which is comprised of police officers, states that in these controversial police shootings, the district attorney should be removed because of the incestuous relationship. And we should have a special prosecutor investigate these shootings. Over the years - and in particular, these two latest incidents in Missouri and New York City - you see where the district attorney, who can indict a ham sandwich whenever they want to indict a ham sandwich, failed to get an indictment in two cases that are very much problematic. And we believe because of the relationship, there's a lack of will to get indictments of police officers because of their close, close, very close relationship.

CORNISH: Meanwhile, on the police side, you were a training supervisor with the NYPD for a time. Is there a specific training you think local departments should be emphasizing right now?

LEADER: Well, you know, it's always amusing for me to hear commissioners throughout the country talk about training after we have a horrific incident. New York City Police Department's one of the best-trained departments in the world, I would go to say. A lot of departments come to New York to receive training. So it's always comical for me to hear the police commissioner or the mayor to talk about training.

Training is not the problem. We have a problem of racism within law enforcement as it relates to communities of color. You know, some of these horrific incidents only occur in communities of color. And officers that get trained in the police academy are dispersed throughout the city. How come it's not happening everywhere?

CORNISH: What is it like for you to be a black police officer in this moment?

LEADER: Right. When I was in uniform, and sometimes a member of the community would spew out their anger on me, I didn't take it personal because I understood. And I observed what was going on, and I agreed with a lot of what they said. And many times, people in the community only complain at these egregious shootings 'cause police officers lock individuals up and shoot individuals, you know, periodically. And you very rarely see this level of outrage unless it's a grotesque shooting that the community really believes is unjust.

So a lot of times, I was sympathetic, but at the same time, I'm a police officer, so - though, there is a balance because I cannot ignore, like some of my co-officers would do, the passions of the community 'cause they were right. This was an egregious shooting. It was wrong. And the officer would be - should be prosecuted. And I'm not going to side with him just because both of us wear the same uniform. If it's wrong, it's wrong.

CORNISH: Noel Leader, thank you so much for speaking with us.

LEADER: Why, thank you.

CORNISH: That was retired New York police sergeant Noel Leader.

Geoff: This reminds me of a story from Outcasts United where the soccer coach Luma was pulled over and arrested, the whole confrontation with the police was going completely okay until they asked for her name, when they saw that she had an Arab name, this provoked the police to ask the question, what are you even doing in America, which they had no right to ask.

Sean: yeah she had no right to ask that, because Luma deserves to be in this country just as much as every other person, including the cop deserves to be.

Zach: Yeah I completely agree, yeah i mean they had no right and this does prove that there is some racism in the police force.

Topic 3

Zach: Our last topic for today will be on Joe Nelson's article about San Bernardino County. San Bernardino is not a small place, it is home to around 2.1 million people and is described as racially and ethnically diverse. Some citizens believe that the police and community's relationship here needs some tweaking. Although they have a lot of confidence in their programs, they are always prepared for large outbreaks. Police Chief Jarrod Burguan stated "Every officer out in the field usually has in the trunk of their car basic crowd-control equipment." While they are prepared for these situations, their main goal is to prevent the situations from occurring in the first place. They have attempted to do this by implementing multiple programs including things such as Coffee with a cop, the Information Exchange Committee, monthly meeting with advisory groups, and body cameras for officers on duty. Coffee with a Cop seems to be one of their more successful programs. How it works is once a week officers meet with citizens and they discuss problems in their community. This is similar to their Information Exchange committee where reps from various communities meet with the sheriff 4 times a year. In these meetings the Sheriff informs the community of the recent events happening in the department and also listens to problems in the community. The Police also meet with advisory groups monthly and have an open line of communication with the community that is open 24/7. One of the newer programs they are implementing is the body cameras. This program requires patrolling officers to have a body camera on at all times so everything they do is recorded. Even with all of these programs some people still have "frosty" feelings towards the police. The President of NAACP's San Bernardino Branch, A. Majadi disagrees. He stated that the amount of racial profiling phone calls he has received has dramatically dropped in the last two years. Most of the programs they have implemented have gone into effect in that time period, so obviously they are doing something right in San Bernardino.

Justin: You know out of all those things I think the biggest thing they are doing is the body cams. Basically It keeps the cops in line, you are constantly seeing what they are doing.

Sean: Yeah but with that though, it's the best way to stop the violence but I would say, if you were to implement those throughout the country it would take so much money that would it really be worth it. Rather than just trying to make programs to restore the trust.

Justin: Right, but I just think at the end of the day it is worth it monetarily, you can take money from other locations. Obviously it is working for this community so if the results show...

Zach: Well i mean, the community hasn't implemented; since the article has been written they have implemented this program but we don't the effects of it because it has just started.

Justin: Yeah long term..

Zach: I do agree that it is expensive, but I believe that it is worth it. Because once the; with all the recents things that have been happening, like Ferguson and the Baltimore riots. The thing that we haven't had clear evidence of is what happened. We don't know what happened at the actual thing. If we could record that and analyze and figure out what exactly happened at this certain point in time. I think all of this stuff and all these riots that happened. There wouldn't be a place for them to happen because we have proof, there is no grey area where people can say yeah but what if this happened or what is this happened.

Sean: See I feel like that would happen because we have had videos like Tracy Gardner in New York, getting choked out in the street. And the cop was found innocent I believe, I feel like no matter what you do people will try to dispute it. Even if there is clear evidence, especially if you are trying to get it on their side.

Zach: But maybe there is always going to be disputation but will there be riots, will there be these giant groups of people trying to cause harm or property damage?

Sean: It could make people more mad seeing the deaths, like if you saw an innocent death on tv from a body camera that would make people a lot more mad at the cops.

Justin: Yeah but at the end of the day the police and the justice department see what they did wrong and it is a quick clean process. People might hate the cops but they are going to get the results.

Zach: We are going to get the truth. That is what is most important , we get the truth and we get to see what happens. It think the body cams will successfully do that.

Justin: It works both ways you either see the cop did everything they were supposed to. They did their training, they followed their training, everything they did was in order and the person died because of their own faults. Or the cop was acting racially motivated or the cop was acting out of their training. And you see the fault they did so they are accused. I think ultimately, it's hopeful I mean there are some negative side effects. There is a lot of hindsight bias that goes into those thing like if a cop shoots a guy cause he is reaching for his pocket you thought he was drawing a gun but it ends up there was

nothing in his pocket, he was unarmed, a lot of people say that was an unarmed man you shot here's the video, he's unarmed but that's hindsight bias. You look at it from the cops point of view that guy could pull a gun on him.

Zach: Whenever a cop is holding you if they are telling you don't move and they have a gun pointed at you, what do you? You don't move it's very simple, you do what they say because they are holding your life in their hands. If you do something they tell you not to, they have a right to assume that you are trying to cause harm to them. Like if you have your hands up and you start moving to your pocket and they tell you don't move, you don't move, it's plain and simple I think.

Justin: But sometimes there is grey area.

Zach: There is grey area that isn't as obvious as that.

Justin: The only concern for me is you get in that situation and a mistake that you don't think about the cop pulling the gun on you. You just think there is something in your pocket or whatever stupid thing you say. Do you deserve to die over that stupid thing, it's a tough topic. But going back to the body cams I think ultimately it would help. That is the only grey area that I see but I think that is a helpful thing.

Zach: So before we run out of time, I want to talk about this quote I really like from the article. "Once a week, San Bernardino police lieutenants Travis Walker and Rich Lawhead host "Coffee with a Cop," in which members of the community can meet to discuss issues in their communities. So I think this is one the best things you can do because you allow the citizens first of all to talk about problems they have in the community. It also puts a face to the police, you are not just talking about the police you are talking about these two Lieutenants. You go and talk to them, you specifically meet them. And I think when you meet someone it's.. harder to hate someone if you know who they are. Like someone asks you for \$20, it's your friend, you will probably think about it, and you might say yes. But if it's some person randomly walking down the street next to you, you are probably going to say no because you don't know who they are. So I kinda apply that to here where it's harder to hate someone when you learn about their life and learned who they are. You've learned their name, you have maybe become friends with them.

Sean: Yeah but on the same hand it would be hard for the cop to do his job because if he is really good friends with the people and he sees them doing something bad he might let them slip by. And that may make other people who he is not good friends with angry and may cause more problems.

Justin: Yeah but at the end of the day I think it is a good thing, cause you are going beyond putting new laws up to fix the issue with communities and police. You are going in and you're actually trying to make a stand in the community and fix the problem, which I think it is a step in the right direction.

Zach: It is definitely a step in the right direction, which is what we need to do right now, to solve these problems in the community.