

THE SUNDIAL

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What a year. Amid worries of the spike in COVID-19 cases in summer 2020, we witnessed and covered protests around Los Angeles, from Trump rallies to demonstrations calling for former District Attorney Jackie Lacey's resignation.

One of the protests we covered centered around Quinten Thomas, a former CSUN student. Father of a newborn baby girl and a member of CSUN's Educational Opportunity Program, Thomas was a star student whose life was cut short at the age of 22 when he died in police custody in 2018. There has not been much coverage of his case and in this issue, we hope to spread awareness and show our audience that Thomas is more than just a name — he was a human with a story.

This issue also takes an indepth look at policing as a whole, from an opinion article on defunding the police (page 18), to a look at the school-to-prison pipeline (page 21) and even an interview with CSUN's new interim police chief (page 4).

The Sundial will continue to take larger looks at issues we face throughout the year. We were a weekly newsmagazine that discussed different communities and the issues that they faced. However, in March 2020 we were forced to stop publishing due to the COVID-19 pandemic and we have been publishing digitally for the last year. As vaccines became more accessible and COVID-19 mandates allowed us to slowly return to in-person activities, printing has returned! The Sundial magazine will be a compilation of short and long form storytelling that gives us a deeper understanding of an issue we face in our daily lives.

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Things to know when talking to police

By Trevor Morgan
Online Editor

For many, talking to cops is not always an easy thing to do. Whether it's a routine traffic stop, if you're the victim of a crime, or even if you're a suspect in a crime, knowing your rights and how to talk to law enforcement is an extremely useful, and sometimes necessary, thing to know.

In this piece we'll be talking about some of the do's and don'ts of talking to police in California according to law offices, experts, and the American Civil Liberties Union.

First, let's address what the context is:

There are generally three types of police encounters.

Consensual Encounters

This can either be when you're answering questions voluntarily (maybe you witnessed a crime or an accident) or you, or someone else, called the police because you may have been a victim of a crime. It's very important to know that in this type of encounter **YOU ARE FREE TO LEAVE WHENEVER YOU WANT.**

It's very important to ask the law enforcement officer you're talking to if you are being detained, arrested, or if you are free to leave. Law experts recommend that you always remain polite, but to have this question answered in the beginning stages of your encounter. If you are not being detained or arrested, you are free to leave and you are not required to answer any questions or provide any information, if you do not feel comfortable doing so.

Detentions

The second type of encounter listed is a detention. Many will experience detention at least once in their lives. These include routine traffic stops and sometimes investigations into crimes. During these encounters you **ARE NOT** allowed to leave.

During this period you do have **THE RIGHT TO REMAIN SILENT**, but you still may be required to provide information, especially if you are stopped in your car (such as license, registration, and proof of insurance). Refusing to provide this information may result in an arrest.

Whether you've been detained in your car or outside of your car, you can still **STATE YOUR CONSENT OR NON-CON-**



LAPD police officers begin to form a barricade on Fourth Street in Downtown Los Angeles following a protest about the indictment of the Louisville police officers involved with Breonna Taylor's murder. Photo by Christopher Torres

SENT FOR A SEARCH. However, do not resist a search, you may be arrested, but still clearly state if you do or do not consent to one, this may help in your trial if there is one.

Other quick tips from the ACLU on detentions:

If in your car, keep your hands on the wheel and let the officer know that you will be reaching for the required documents, (license, registration, proof of insurance) when you are about to do so.

If you receive a ticket, sign it. You may be arrested if you don't.

Take the DUI test, unless you want to risk your license being suspended.

You can always ask the officer if a licensed driver can pick up your car and park it in a safe location to avoid towing fees or a parking ticket on your vehicle.

What you **SHOULDN'T** do during a detention.

Do not physically resist a search, simply state that you do not consent.

Do not search for license or registration until asked to do so.

Don't disrespect the officer. According to the ACLU you of course "have a constitutional right to do so" but doing so, may lead to your arrest.

Don't try to bribe the police.

Do not have anything hanging from your rear-view mirror, as it might give police a reason to pull you over.

Arrests

In the event of your arrest, the ACLU recommends only giving your name and basic information and nothing else.

State that you **WANT TO REMAIN SILENT AS IT IS YOUR RIGHT.**

State that you **WANT TO SPEAK TO A LAWYER AS IT IS ALSO YOUR RIGHT.**

The ACLU also advises those who are arrested to make sure they get their three phone calls within three hours and that two additional calls can be given if you have children under 18 to arrange for childcare.

Police do record calls and **ANYTHING YOU SAY CAN BE USED AGAINST YOU IN YOUR TRIAL.** Unless the call is with your lawyer, these calls cannot be recorded or used against you.

Again, the ACLU advises that when arrested, you do not disclose or talk about anything to the police besides giving them basic information like your name and address and to not make any decisions about your case until you talk to your lawyer, no matter what the police tell you.

In the eyes of interim CSUN Chief of Police, Alfredo Fernandez

By Christopher Torres
Editor-in-Chief

When and why did you first decide to pursue a career in law enforcement?

Alfredo Fernandez: When I got out of high school, I was still trying to figure out what I wanted to do and I didn't have a lot of direction. So I started going to community college and when I went to community college, I started to take a few courses along that line and I found that I had an interest in law enforcement. So that's kind of how I got here.

You have had over 25 years of experience with law enforcement here at CSUN. What is it about this campus community that has kept you committed to CSUN for all those years?

So I've been part of this community for the longest of all my law enforcement experience. I've actually been in law enforcement for 34 years and I started here in 1998. I guess I could best illustrate why CSUN is important to me with the story that I often tell people. It means a lot to me because it's what I think makes CSUN special.

Quite a few years ago, I have a recollection of when we were setting up for a graduation and that's the whole reason we're here, to watch the students walk across the stage and get their diplomas and move on and be productive people in society. So it's always a very exciting thing so we were preparing the grounds, over at the [University] Lawn to get ready for a big commencement because always a lot of family shows up.

About an hour and a half before this particular commencement, I saw a elderly Latino gentleman standing there with these two, big, four-by-four poles, probably about six to eight feet tall. He was holding those and I walked up to

him and I said, "Excuse me, sir. Why do you have these two, big, four-by-fours?" In Spanish, he said that he was going to pound them into the ground, and he was going to put a banner across the spot where his daughter could see that they were proud of her graduation. And as he told me the story, tears began to well in his eyes, and I said, "Sir, I can't let you put these down," and he said "No, you don't understand. My daughter will be the first

about. It's about providing opportunities for those who have traditionally been underserved to get their education, and every year, I see the same thing. Maybe it's not in the form of this gentleman, but I see the same thing. I see people so proud to see their sons, daughters, grandsons and granddaughters graduating. And to me, that is the most amazing experience and why I think CSUN is special.

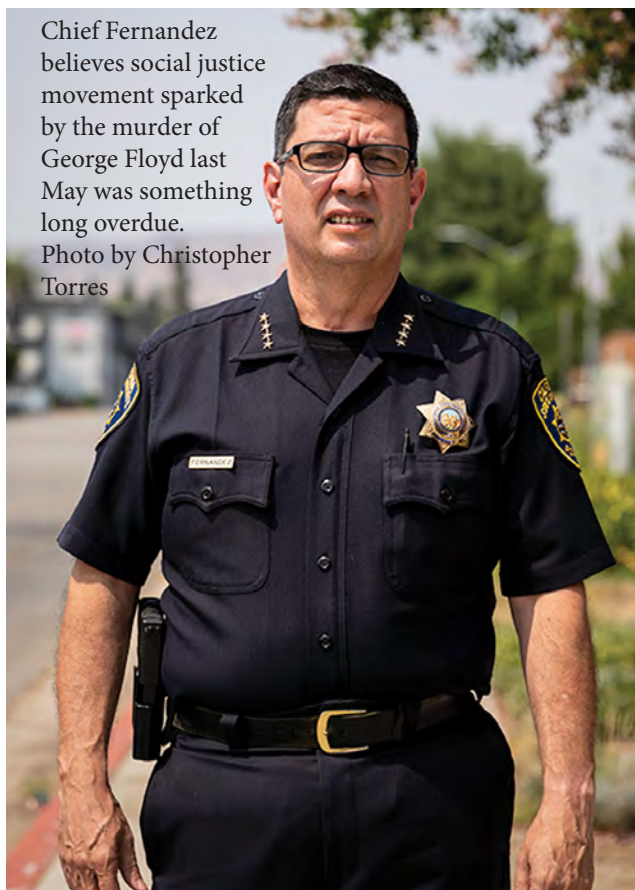
You were involved in the formation of the first police canine unit on campus. How was that planned and did you experience any obstacles along the way?

So, I've been here since 1998, but I did leave for a short stint to work at Cal State Channel Islands, and at Channel Islands, they were a very small campus just starting off. And we had a canine program there. I got the introduction into the canine program there and when I came back to CSUN, I came back as a lieutenant. I was in a position to take a leadership role in any kind of program. Lucky for me, the chief at the time, Chief Anne Glavine, shared my idea that canines have brought a lot to the campus and so she supported it. I put all the work into it, I did all the research and I found the funding sources to make it happen. It was an experience.

Now I'll tell you that the person that I really think had a lot to bear with starting this program was our first canine officer. His name was Ray Gonzalez. At the time, I didn't quite have the money yet for

a new patrol car, but we had this old CSO van, and we called it the "Scooby van." It was old and beat up and he had to ride in that for the first few months. Later on, we were able to purchase a new car. If there were any challenges, it was coming up with that initial funding.

We did a lot of fundraising and we found places that would provide us with a canine on a grant. The dog was like \$4,000 and we got that dog for free.



Chief Fernandez believes social justice movement sparked by the murder of George Floyd last May was something long overdue.
Photo by Christopher Torres

one to ever graduate from college in our entire family, and I am so proud of her."

Well, of course I couldn't let him put the poles down because the grounds people would have killed me. But, we did find a way so that he could spread that banner out at the appropriate moment, and it was kind of bending the rules because they weren't allowed to do that but nobody at CSUN questioned me on letting that one get by. That's what CSUN is all



Alfredo Fernandez, the interim Chief of Police at CSUN, stands in front of a mural in the Police Services building.
Photo by Christopher Torres

It's just doing a lot of legwork to bring the program without putting in a lot of money because the campus doesn't have a lot of money to spend on these kinds of things so you have to do a lot of fundraising and finding grants.

So that was the biggest challenge but it was also very exciting and of course today, we have a well-established, well-respected canine program that brings a lot of value to the university's safety and the environment of the safety. I'm glad you asked about that because that's something I'm quite proud of.

The phrase "community policing" has become popular in terms of how various towns, cities, and other entities such as institutions of higher education are rethinking the roles of their police departments. Can you tell me what community policing means to you, and how important it is to maintain a safe environment in the community in which you serve?

The thing about community policing is that the term has been out there for many years. Long before any of the current situations that have occurred in law enforcement recently, community

policing has been a model that has been considered the best practice for police departments for many years. So with that, it also becomes somewhat cliché. Plenty of people say, "Hey, my department is a community policing department." What does that mean? Well, to us, it means collaboration with the community. It means meeting up with what we would call stakeholders. Stakeholders are the community members, but the community has multiple stakeholders because we have faculty, we have staff, we have students and we have community from outside.

For example, right now, we have officers working on the problem of the damage that skateboarders bring onto the campus. Some folks that like to ride their skateboards. They like to trick skate and that causes damage and then it also causes safety issues when you're riding a skateboard through a crowd. So, we have a couple of police officers working on a project and the whole idea of working on the project is, they don't just sit there and go, "Okay we're going to put a sign here that says no skateboarding and we're going to put extra patrol in this area so that we can catch the skateboarders."

No, that's not the plan. We go out and

we meet with the various stakeholders, which might be somebody from physical plant management that talks to us about where the vandalism is occurring. We might meet with some faculty members that are concerned during the height of the day when there's a bunch of students walking and some kids moving through skateboards and causing injuries. We try to meet with everybody to come up with solutions so maybe we come up with some kind of device that makes it unwelcoming for somebody to ride their trick skateboard there. Maybe we do an education program where officers talk to skateboarders.

Now, the interesting thing of course right now is, I don't have any crowds, but we will eventually. So we'll talk to them about maybe not riding their skateboards here during a certain time of the day, so hopefully, the last option is enforcement. It's more about solving the problem as a community and when you have the support of the community, oftentimes, they can help you enforce the end result because they bought into it. They want

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Quinten Thomas in
summer of 2014
during EOP Bridge.
Photo courtesy of EOP.

NOT JUST ANOTHER NAME

By Sloane Bozzi, Shannon Carter, Orlando Mayorquin, and Emily Holshouser

Quinten Thomas was a fourth-year CSUN student studying to become a registered nurse when he died suddenly at the Los Angeles Twin Towers correctional facility on March 9, 2018. Many remember Thomas as the CSUN student that died in police custody however, for those who knew him he was more than a statistic. This series explores Thomas' story and how complexity and after effects of policing affected him and his loved ones.

CHAPTER I:

“His future was bright, but his life was taken too soon.”

It was the first day of the summer semester of 2014. The classroom began to fill with students who scattered about, looking around for a familiar face before settling down near the back of the class. There he was, quietly waiting in the front corner of the classroom. All 6 foot 4 inches of him sat awkwardly in a typical chair and desk combo that commonly furnishes a classroom.

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CHAPTER II:

“Please don’t tell me he’s dead.”

Four-year old Ashanti Thomas unwrapped a Barbie playset for Christmas last December, a gift from her father, Quinten Thomas. This wasn’t the first time she had received the playset. Her father had given it to her on her first birthday. He didn’t realize the playset had too many small pieces for baby Ashanti, so her mother, Saharra White, put it aside for her to open this year now that she’s old enough to enjoy it.

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CHAPTER III:

“I will not let them get away with it.”

Just before 9 a.m. on March 9, 2018, a nurse approached Cell B-16 at Twin Towers Correctional Facility. Quinten Thomas, the 22-year-old Black man who was in that cell, was a CSUN student who had been in jail for six days after LAPD officers apprehended him at a CVS in Northridge on an outstanding warrant for failing to appear in court.

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Courtesy of EOP at CSUN

CHAPTER I:

“His future was bright, but his life was taken too soon.”

It was the first day of the summer semester of 2014. The classroom began to fill with students who scattered about, looking around for a familiar face before settling down near the back of the class.

There he was, quietly waiting in the front corner of the classroom. All 6 foot 4 inches of him sat awkwardly in a typical chair and desk combo that commonly furnishes a classroom. The choice to sit in the front of the classroom was an intentional move. It was a message that said, ‘I’m here, and I’m ready to learn,’ and this simple action would leave a lasting impression. This day would mark the beginning of his academic journey, one that would bring him hope and optimism.

His name was Quinten Thomas. He was the type of guy that knew everyone, and everyone knew him. He put others first. He showed humility by admitting his faults but he rarely boasted of his accomplishments. He inspired many others because his heart was led by love. He was a father, a friend and a CSUN Matador.

His future was bright, but his life was taken too soon.

On the morning of March 9, 2018, he died in police custody at Twin Towers jail in downtown Los Angeles. The details surrounding his death remain a mystery. The only thing that’s clear is his impact on the lives around him and his desire for a better future.

At first glance, Quinten looked intimidating. He was tall,

Black, tattooed and weighed nearly 200 pounds. When he spoke, the whole room looked in his direction to see where the baritone-like voice was coming from.

Those that remember meeting Quinten said he was soft-spoken and shy at first. Maybe his tall build, deep voice and Black skin were intimidating to others, so he instinctively knew to speak softer to put others at ease. Everyone that crossed his path said once you got to know him, he was a “giant teddy bear” who thought of others before himself.

Quinten was raised in the Los Angeles foster care system and was admitted to CSUN through the Educational Opportunity Program, which provides aid and mentorship to foster youth and low-income and first-generation college students.

In the summer before his first semester at CSUN, Quinten was selected to join the EOP Resilient Scholars Program. He filled out the application and had an interview with EOP, where he had to demonstrate that he was highly motivated and had the potential to graduate. Usually, the students in this program wouldn’t be admitted to CSUN, but the RSP grants them special admissions.

The program aims at ensuring students have access to campus resources such as help with the admissions process, financial aid and year-round housing. According to the EOP website, without these support service programs, less than 1% of all foster youth

who attend a four-year university graduate from college.

Jina Gonzalez, associate director of EOP, was one of Quinten's mentors who helped him navigate college life. Gonzalez said that Quinten often hung around the EOP lab and regularly visited her, probably more than any other student. Gonzalez helped him secure housing on more than one occasion. She acted as a mentor and sometimes, she was a mother figure to Quinten. When he felt like giving up on college, she was a source of motivation.

Some semesters, Quinten struggled to keep afloat. The pressures of college and the constant stress of depending on resources for basic needs caused Quinten to fall behind in some classes. In 2016, he began suffering from epileptic seizures, which also contributed to his stress levels.

But despite the moments of lost motivation, he didn't give up. He was proud to be at CSUN. People that knew him said he was committed to his academic future. He never passed up an opportunity to talk with others about the benefits of higher education and how it changed his life.

CSUN often hosts campus tours and events for foster youth in middle school and high school. Whenever there was an on-campus event, Quinten always volunteered to speak with the youth groups about his background and experiences. Quinten acted like a big brother to these prospective students. Sometimes, he would bring friends to the campus on his own accord and give them a tour. More than once, he went back to his high school in Lancaster to talk to students about the value of college. It was his way of saying 'if I can do it, so can you.'

Quinten felt compelled to give back and show other students the opportunities that he was given. Gonzalez said that Quinten left a valuable impression during the tours because students would ask 'Where's Quinten?' when they returned to campus.

"He was always the type of person that talked to everyone," Gonzalez said. "He just crossed barriers and didn't care who you were or what you were. He made a lot of connections and relationships with CSUN people."

He decided to major in health administration to become a registered nurse because he wanted to make a difference in people's lives. His experience in EOP opened up the path to his potential. But above all else, he found something priceless there: he found a community and home.

In 2014, Quinten gave a heartfelt speech on his experience in EOP during the Resident Scholars Program ceremony. His speech was enough to make the hairs on your arms stand up. He spoke with a level of self-awareness that showed a wisdom that extended beyond his years.

"If this hour was the last hour I had on earth, and God told me to give my last words before I left, I would say thanks to those in my EOP family for believing in me. This has been one of my best experiences in life," he said.

He revealed that before joining EOP, he assumed that all families were dysfunctional because his family was. Quinten was a byproduct of a system that never showed him what a family could be. He shared with peers and mentors that some of his family members had gang affiliations.

"You see, I come from a community of poverty, hate and violence,"

Quinten said. "Being here at EOP Bridge has helped me to realize that parents are only human. Forget about the things you wished you had or could've had, and notice the things you have, and that's love. I want everyone to know that someone somewhere ... loves you."

Quinten wanted nothing more than to leave that world behind and escape those physical and psychological dangers he grew accustomed to. He wanted to achieve something that no other man in his family had done until that point, graduate from college. He knew that CSUN was his ticket to that brighter future.

"He would always say I don't want to go back to where I came from; it's not good for me," Gonzalez said. "That was hard to hear on a regular basis. So, we tried to keep him as close to us as possible and just keep him busy."

Tye Roberts, 24, one of Quinten's closest friends at CSUN and former roommate, called him an "early bird." Quinten would wake up at 6 a.m. and blast his favorite rapper Chief Keef while studying for class.

Quinten wasn't the type of college student who stayed up all night, frequented parties or hung out in the streets being reckless.

Roberts looked up to Quinten like a brother and an inspiration. He saw how much Quinten would light up when talking about his goals and aspirations.

"He was a good person; he meant well. He wanted to succeed in life and wanted to improve his living situation, just like we all are," Roberts said. "We're [all] trying to live and improve our situation, just level up in life; that's what he wanted to do."

"He was a good person; he meant well. He wanted to succeed in life and wanted to improve his living situation, just like we all are," Roberts said. "We're [all] trying to live and improve our situation, just level up in life; that's what he wanted to do."

Roberts, also a former student with CSUN's EOP, said that when he met

Quinten, he was quiet and always had a poker face.

"You couldn't tell if he was mad, angry, or if that was just his natural face," Roberts said.

When they became close, Quinten felt comfortable enough to flash his magnetic smile and let out a hearty laugh.

For nearly a year, the two were practically inseparable. They would go to class in the mornings, study at the University Library or EOP office, spend the remainder of the day goofing around, playing "Madden NFL," ordering burgers, bottomless french fries and strawberry lemonades from Red Robin.

Roberts said that Quinten was an honest friend who wasn't afraid to face his responsibilities. He didn't procrastinate and didn't shy away from admitting his faults. He asked for help when he needed it.

William Watkins, dean of students and vice president of Student Affairs, remembers Quinten walked up to him, introduced himself and said, 'I'm a freshman here, and I'm having some difficulties.' Quinten shared with him that he had received a university bill, which charged him \$2,600 for the damage of a piece of equipment he rented.

Watkins was able to resolve the issue for him within 24 hours. Overcome with gratitude and amazement, Quinten emailed Watkins to ask him if he would mentor him.

"We did that, and over the years thereafter, I had a chance to come to know him to know his struggles. To know where he had come from, his challenges with numbers of systems, and his continuous efforts to work things out both in his academic life as

well as his personal life,” Watkins said.

Quinten was far from perfect — he was opinionated and stubborn at times. When he felt comfortable with a person, he had no problem speaking his mind and ruffling feathers.

Quinten and his EOP family didn’t see eye to eye. One time, he disagreed with some of Gonzalez’s advice regarding housing options. He sent her a passionate email giving her a piece of his mind.

“He knew the advice that I gave him came from the heart and came from a good place, and maybe at that time when I gave him the advice, it wasn’t something that he wanted to hear,” Gonzalez said.

After a few days and sometimes weeks, when he understood what Gonzalez was trying to say and do, he would always come back to her and apologize.

“But when he realized that it was for his benefit, he did acknowledge it, and he would come back and say ‘now I understand what you’re trying to say.’ So, I think it was very mature of him to do that,” Gonzalez said.

Quinten was always forthcoming and honest about his mistakes, whereas, he never bragged or looked for praise when he did something right. Glenn Omatsu, EOP Faculty Mentor Program coordinator, said that he would always hear about Quinten’s good deeds from other students or mentors.

Omatsu said that Quinten was able to help other people without even realizing that he was helping others. He recalled a story about Quinten that another EOP student told him.

During the second week of the summer EOP program, this other student decided that he and Quinten would “have it out” because both men had family affiliations with rival gangs. The two young men were destined to fight, like rivals from opposite sides of town.

Omatsu said that one afternoon when the coast was clear, the other student waited in the empty halls of the EOP offices to confront Quinten.

Except Quinten had no plans to fight.

“Isn’t it great that we’re both college students, and we don’t have to fight?” Quinten said to the other student.

Quinten walked away shortly after that, but his calm and positive response left a lasting impact on the student.

Quinten didn’t want to jeopardize his opportunity with CSUN and was fighting for something bigger and better.

He encouraged the ones around him to do the same.

“For all my Bridge peers, my homies — my riders, I want you to know that you can do anything you put your heart to,” Quinten said in his 2014 speech.

Quinten’s death came as a surprise to many. He wasn’t known to be a violent person; he didn’t have a criminal record, and before March 2, 2018, he had never been arrested.

Gonzalez remembered the day she found out about Quinten’s death.

“I couldn’t believe it. I never expected it and for him to die by himself in prison. I think it’s very hard just knowing that,” Gonzalez said. “I can’t even imagine what he went through.”

With no money or assets to his name, it wouldn’t be an easy task to ensure Quinten received a proper burial. It took a liter-

al village to cover the cost. Through donations, a GoFundMe campaign and the assistance of the CSUN Foundation, the burial funds were raised. CSUN collected more than \$3,300 from individuals and contributed \$1,500 from the university to help cover the remaining expenses, according to Ira Unterman, chief financial officer of the CSUN Foundation.

Gonzalez credits former President Dianne F. Harrison for approving the \$1,500 allocation to cover Quinten’s burial and services.

“I just remember that someone told me that [Harrison] said to make it happen and that they were gonna figure it out, and they figured it out,” Gonzalez said. “I just gave them the information they needed, and I didn’t have to do anything after that.”

His impact on the people he met was evident during his funeral services. Everyone from childhood friends and family members to EOP and CSUN staff and peers paid their respects. Gonzalez said the crowd at Quinten’s funeral was mixed between young and old, with people she hadn’t seen in years.

Quinten’s memory continues to live on. Fundraising efforts have been created to raise money to support his three-year-old daughter, Ashanti. Since Quinten’s death, there have been memorials held in his name. Black Lives Matter Northridge chapter and Ashanti’s mother, Sahaara White, have taken to the street to

demand answers. CSUN’s Faculty Senate called for the university to create a legal fund for White to continue to pursue justice for Quinten.

On Feb. 17, organizers from Project Rebound hosted an event, “Remembering Quinten Thomas: The Fight for Justice Continues,” where White joined other community activists and spoke about the struggle to seek justice for Quinten. Project Rebound is a campus organization that supports and mentors formerly incarcerated individuals, by making higher education more accessible.

Recently, CSUN launched a yearly scholarship opportunity in Quinten’s name that awards an eligible student \$1,000. Current undergraduates and graduate students can apply if they have been former foster youth, formerly incarcerated, youth on probation, or unhoused.

Martha Escobar, an associate professor in the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies, is one of the scholarship organizers. She said that idea for the scholarship originated during a discussion between Escobar, Gonzalez and other leaders in EOP, and the University Student Union. They wanted to memorialize Quinten and create a scholarship that will serve as a reminder of the struggles that some students go through.

“We wanted to make sure we remember Quinten because he represents a lot of our students and their struggles,” Escobar said. “And the kind of work that we need to do to make sure that none of our students go through what he went through,” Escobar said.

Quinten’s peers and mentors promise to continue to honor his legacy. At the Project Rebound event, Watkins shared the importance of carrying the torch to “fight systems of oppression and to take on systems of inequity that lockout and take lives away.”

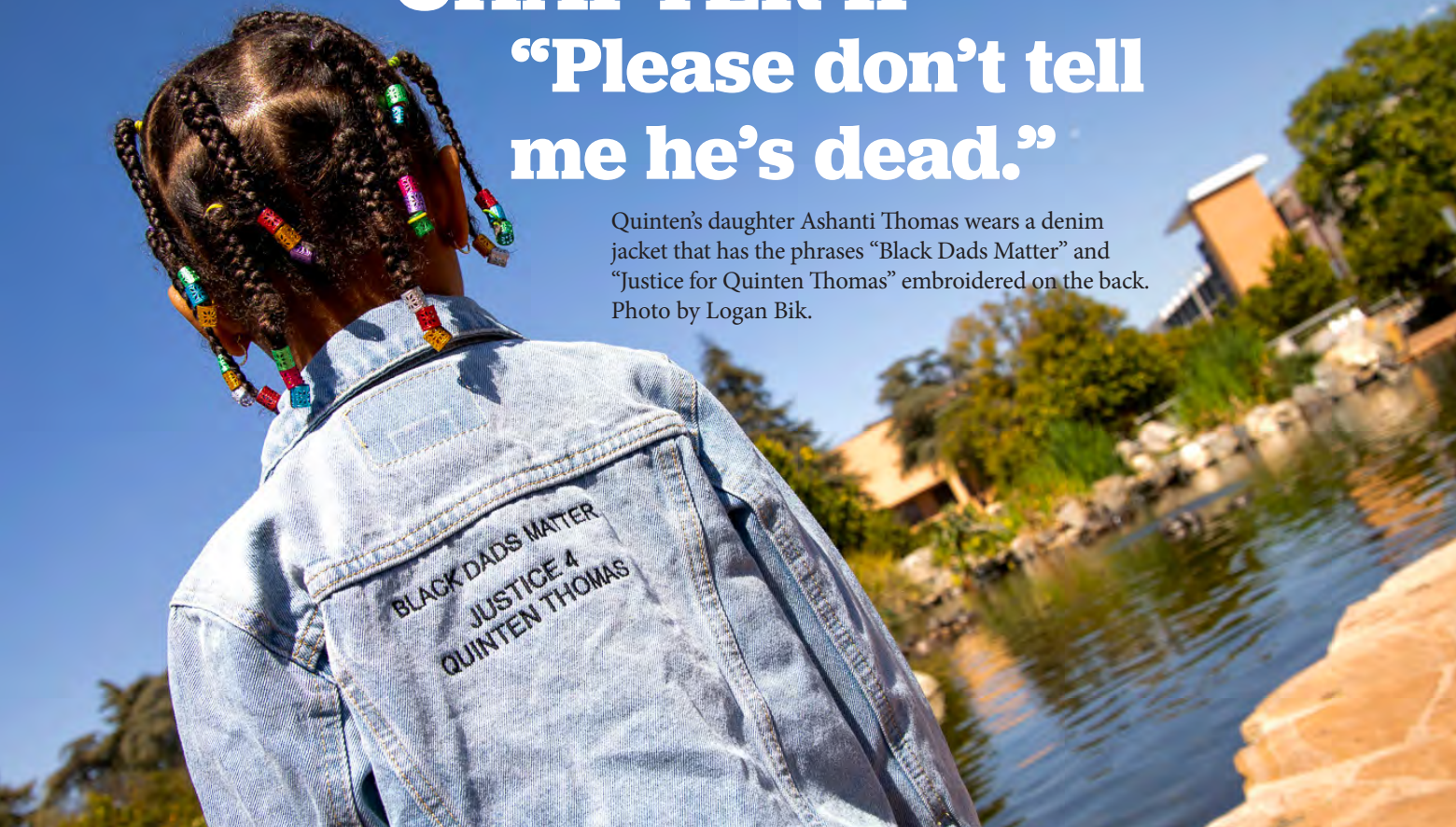
Watkins closed his comments by making a vow: “Certainly, as long as I’m around, Quinten will be honored and will be remembered.”



CHAPTER II

“Please don’t tell me he’s dead.”

Quinten’s daughter Ashanti Thomas wears a denim jacket that has the phrases “Black Dads Matter” and “Justice for Quinten Thomas” embroidered on the back. Photo by Logan Bik.



Four-year old Ashanti Thomas unwrapped a Barbie playset for Christmas last December, a gift from her father, Quinten Thomas.

This wasn't the first time she had received the playset. Her father had given it to her on her first birthday. He didn't realize the playset had too many small pieces for baby Ashanti, so her mother, Saharra White, put it aside for her to open this year now that she's old enough to enjoy it.

However, Thomas is no longer in Ashanti's life to watch her open the gift. Thomas, who was a health administration major at CSUN, died at the Twin Towers jail on March 9, 2018.

After Thomas' death, White initiated a civil suit on behalf of Ashanti against the County of Los Angeles for the jail's handling of Thomas before he died. The suit alleges the county did not provide him with the appropriate level of care while he was in police custody.

The circumstances surrounding his death remain unknown, but according to the coroner's report, Thomas died due to an idiopathic seizure, a result of his epilepsy. The autopsy also noted a cardiomegaly, or an enlarged heart.

Thomas was taking medication called Keppra to manage his seizures. He suffered two seizures while he was at Twin Towers, but skipped a dose of his medication on the day that he died.

Thomas' death did not make national headlines and now more than three years later, White is still working to raise awareness for what she believes was a preventable incident in jail. She attends countless protests and commemorative events to ensure the community remembers his name leading up to the trial.

A civil suit was originally supposed to take place last November, but was postponed multiple times throughout the COVID-19 pandemic as the county court system protocols distinguished which

cases were heard or postponed. The case is set to take place in January 2022.

Earlier this year, the judge offered to have the case tried by herself via video conference format, rather than an in-person trial by jury. RoseAnn Frazee, an attorney for White as guardian on behalf of Ashanti, could not afford to pay experts for trial witnesses, so she agreed to postpone the trial by jury.

At a commemorative event hosted by CSUN, Frazee said she tried to hire more attorneys to bring more attention to the case, to no avail. Frazee also tried to bring in Ben Crump, a civil rights attorney who represented the family of George Floyd in the trial against Derek Chauvin.

Frazee brought on multiple expert witnesses to try and prove the plaintiff's side, each costing thousands of dollars. According to Frazee, collecting evidence cost their side over \$20,000 so far. She expects the trial by jury will cost an additional \$20,000.

More resources, like the expert witnesses, bring with them a growing bill for White to pay.

White is reaching for solutions to afford the trial and resorted to creating a crowdfunding campaign on GoFundMe to collect donations to fund her legal team.

The death of Ashanti's father and trial have created a nightmare for White, who would have never imagined her young adult life would take this turn.

White first met Thomas in 2015, when she was 17 and Thomas was 19. White had just moved to the Los Angeles area to live with her uncle. She was walking around the neighborhood to get familiar with the area the day she met Thomas.

White was walking into Vercher's Central Liquor store for a snack as Thomas and his cousin were walking out.

She remembered the two made eye contact and crossed paths

again at the same intersection as she walked to the park. White described their meeting as fate and the two became friends.

White moved more than 60 miles away to Moreno Valley shortly after they met, but she would often take the train to visit Thomas in L.A.

"I really felt like I was out there to meet him," White said with a smile. "I love telling this story."

The two eventually became a couple and White said he inspired her when it came to continuing her education.

At the time, White was hoping to get her high school diploma at the very least. She said one of the first times she met with Thomas, he proudly showed White a report card marked with A's and B's.

He encouraged her to apply to CSUN through the Educational Occupation Program. She did not get into the program, but soon after started attending Southwest College.

"When I say I would not be in college now if it wasn't for him, I literally would not be in college now if it wasn't for him," White said.

It was on the day of her EOP interview that White found out she was pregnant.

Thomas was supportive during her pregnancy because it was his dream to have a family of his own. Because he was raised in foster care,

Thomas was always searching for community. He was an involved student at CSUN, he was close with his cousins, and now he was starting a family of his own. Ashanti was born in November 2016.

"He was so happy to be a dad," White said. "He's told me before that school and Ashanti are things that saved him."

A few months before Ashanti was born, Thomas was diagnosed with epilepsy. He had suffered a seizure at the CSUN dorms during his freshman year.

The seizures were sporadic at first, but quickly became more regular.

"He'd have a seizure at least once a month," White said. "Most of the time he'd have them in his sleep. And then I started noticing he was having them when he was awake."

When White and Thomas were living together, she was hesitant to leave Thomas at home alone with their newborn baby due to his history of epilepsy.

Once, when they were at home, Thomas walked toward White in a daze with their baby in his arms and managed to hand her the baby before he fell into a full-fledged seizure.

"I grabbed the baby and then I was holding him so he didn't fall back and I just kind of guided him down to the floor and he went into a whole seizure," White said.

To White's knowledge, medical professionals never advised Thomas to live with someone for his safety, but she felt that it was

too risky to leave Thomas alone or with their baby when she was not home.

"I knew he had to have somebody there you know? At least watching, if not watching, checking up on him," White said.

White still worried about his health after the two had ended their relationship. She was scared that he would have a seizure while he was alone.

After their separation, Thomas struggled to pay for school and housing. His financial aid fell through and he had to stay in a shelter. White remembers Thomas was under pressure from many sides at that point in his life.

"Just thinking about the stress it put on him, being a man and having to take care of your family," White said. "He ended up being in all these positions that he never wanted to be in."

White and Thomas' paths started to split, but they remained friends and continued to co-parent Ashanti.

On March 5, 2018, Thomas called White when she was grocery shopping with Ashanti. He said he was in jail. He told her not to worry ?? he'd be back soon. White thought that Thomas would call her later to fill her in on what happened.

"We never had conversations of 'why' [he was in custody]," White said. "He just told me that he would tell me

Ashanti Thomas, Quinten's daughter, wraps her arms around the back of her mother, Saharra White, and pose for a portrait at the CSUN duck pond in Northridge, Calif. Photo by Logan Bik.



later."

She didn't press him on the details. She just wanted to make sure he was okay. She hadn't heard from him in two weeks, so she was happy to hear his voice.

She talked to him other times when he was in jail, and he told her he would be out later that week. Thomas was in jail in Van Nuys and was transferred to Twin Towers three days later. White didn't know that he was transferred to Twin Towers.

A few days later White received another call. This time she would find out Thomas had died.

"When I got the call from the detective, and it sounds like a damn movie," White said. "I got a call from a private number, and I usually don't answer private numbers but for some reason I answered it."

A detective named Gene Morse called and said he wanted to meet about Thomas. She was afraid to tell Morse where she lived, so she agreed to meet him at a McDonald's in Harbor Gateway.

White remembered it was raining hard when she went with Ashanti to meet the detective. When they arrived, Morse was wearing a black suit and sitting at a table.

"Before I even sat down and he said anything I was just like 'please don't tell me he's dead,'" White said.

White learned of Thomas' death in a McDonald's dining room full of strangers. She sat in the parking lot for over three hours

rocking her baby and crying.

White was left questioning how he could have died after just talking to him days prior.

White hired Frazee to make a case against the county and Frazee ordered an independent autopsy. The second autopsy was never completed because they found that his brain was missing from his body. White could not understand why it had been removed.

She was walking to a math class at Southwest College when she received a call from the county coroner. White said they kept his brain. She asked how that was possible, but the coroner confused her with a flood of medical jargon.

The L.A. County Department of the Medical Examiner-Coroner refused to confirm whether or not the brain was kept after the autopsy due to the pending litigation.

“He started going back into all this medical talk that I didn’t really understand and I just wrote down what I could,” White said.

White needed help. She met with Michele Infante, an activist with Dignity and Power Now, a grassroots organization that advocates for incarcerated people and their families.

White said Infante helped her arrange a meeting with two sheriff’s detectives to go over the autopsy, but the two detectives diverted the conversation to discuss his previous time in jail for another misdemeanor charge.

White didn’t get the answers she was looking for that day with the detectives, so she continues to navigate the legal system with support from Dignity and Power Now. She started her new job as a field organizer with DPN to serve other families of incarcerated people.

The series of events in White’s life continues to bring her back to social justice work. White’s father was formerly incarcerated, so as a child, she aspired to become a lawyer to help incarcerated people. Now that her daughter has suffered in a similar way, she has seriously committed herself to social justice.

In addition to working with DPN, White spoke at multiple protests in recent months to raise awareness for the trial.

White spoke at the #BlockGarcetti protests outside of Mayor Eric Garcetti’s house in November. She brought Ashanti along for her first protest.

She tried to bring Ashanti to protests in the past, although she was younger and timid around the crowds. White has answered Ashanti’s questions about the activist scene, telling her which protests they are attending and why.

They both have the support of leading groups at events to ensure Ashanti feels comfortable at the scene. Black Lives Matter Los Angeles even made Ashanti a custom denim jacket that says “my daddy matters.”

“There’s a lot of love out there and BLM and Dignity and Power,” White said. “They’re really my backbone, all that support really helps, and [Ashanti] felt all of that too. And she was more comfortable after that.”

Ashanti often looks at old pictures of her parents together.

White hopes that she can one day tell her daughter definitively what happened to Thomas, because Ashanti already asks questions about her father and is learning about the concept of death at the age of four. She knows her dad is in heaven, but has trouble understanding what exactly that means.

Until then, White hopes the trial will bring answers and justice for both Thomas and their daughter.

“I have to be able to answer stuff like that,” White said. “They have to give me an answer so I can give her an answer. And that’s the whole reason why I’m doing this.”

Ashanti Thomas, Quinten’s daughter, and Saharra White, Ashanti’s mother, pose for a portrait at the CSUN duck pond in Northridge, Calif. Photo by Logan Bik.



CHAPTER III

**“I will not
let them get
away with it.”**

Saharra White, mother of Quinten Thomas’ daughter, holding up a sign with a photo of Thomas at the Northridge Black Lives Matter protest on June 13.
Photo by Michaella Huck.



Just before 9 a.m. on March 9, 2018, a nurse approached Cell B-16 at Twin Towers Correctional Facility. Quinten Thomas, the 22-year-old Black man who was in that cell, was a CSUN student who had been in jail for six days after LAPD officers apprehended him at a CVS in Northridge on an outstanding warrant for failing to appear in court.

The nurse was Nneka Onyiah, who had worked at Twin Towers for more than 20 years. She asked Thomas to take his Keppra, a medication he took for idiopathic seizures.

Thomas rose from his bed and came to the cell door. He refused to take his medication. He said he had a headache, but he refused Tylenol. He said he was in pain.

Onyiah stayed at the cell, pleading with Thomas for him to take his medication, but he wouldn't budge. With over 100 other inmates who also needed their medications to attend to, Onyiah moved on.

Thomas had experienced multiple seizures while he was at Twin Towers. On March 8, he was sent to the Twin Towers medical clinic for a seizure. Another nurse, David Ghalayan, assessed him for half an hour and sent him back to his cell.

Onyiah didn't know about Thomas' other seizures when she approached his cell that morning and neither did the deputies who had peered into his cell.

Deputy Glendale Watkins said in a deposition that he saw Thomas lying face down on the floor in his cell early that morning. Watkins thought he was sleeping. Watkins recalled an incident where an inmate had feigned sleep to attack officers. He believed Thomas was doing the same.

"The way he was positioned, I figured as he's just waiting to

strike," Watkins said.

Deputy Jose Oseguera called Watkins for backup when he could not get a response from Thomas during lunchtime at around 11 a.m. They then called Custody Officer Charlotte Charvarria, who had seen Thomas on pill call the day before.

Fearful of Thomas, the deputies hesitated to approach him as he was a K-10 inmate — a designation for inmates who have a history of "hostile and dangerous" behavior. The reason for Thomas' K-10 status is still scrutinized by the lawyer representing his family, but its stigma marred his last days.

"Knowing that he's a K-10 inmate, these inmates are hostile, unpredictable, and they're ready to get us at all times. So you gotta stay on your toes," Watkins said.

The deputies tried to get a response from Thomas. They couldn't. He was still lying on the cell floor. Oseguera threw an orange juice box at Thomas' head. Thomas still laid there with his cheek touching the concrete floor, his dreadlocks in his face.

"We stand there, we still try to elicit a response, thinking this dude's going to pop up and get us," Watkins said.

The deputies cuffed Thomas' hands and feet and pulled him out of his cell. A nurse arrived at 11:22 a.m. Los Angeles Fire Department paramedics arrived minutes after. The medics found Thomas in full rigor mortis, meaning he had been dead for hours.

Onyiah never gave Thomas his seizure medication on March 9. "And you couldn't give it to him because why?" asked Rose-Ann Frazee, the lawyer representing Thomas' family.

"Do I say it?" Onyiah replied.

"Yes."

"Yeah. He was deceased," Onyiah replied.

Thomas was declared dead at 11:37 a.m. Three years after his death, the circumstances surrounding his death are still being debated. The Los Angeles Sheriff's Department listed Thomas' cause of death as a result of an "idiopathic seizure" in the autopsy performed by the L.A. County coroner's office.

Protective orders placed on case documents by LASD have hidden much of the evidence associated with the case.

During the month he died, Twin Towers was at 141% capacity. The jail was designed to hold 13,000 inmates, but it held over 17,000 inmates during the week that Thomas died. Inmates with misdemeanor charges made up for over half of the facility's population. 30% of those inmates were Black men.

Chavarria said that Thomas appeared groggy on the morning of his death when he refused his medication and told Onyiah he had a headache.

"If you had known that he had signed into the jail and advised the jail of epileptic seizures, would you have acted differently?" Frazee asked Chavarria during her deposition.

"I don't know," Chavarria said. "Yes, I would."

Multiple deputies saw Thomas earlier that morning during daily Title 15 checks — checks that affirm that an inmate is alive and in their cell — at least three times before they realized he was unconscious.

Vickie Jensen, the head of the criminal justice department at CSUN, said that the treatment used by the deputies in Thomas' case is a trend, not a one-off incident.

"The whole correctional facility, from an administrative point of view, doesn't have all the ingredients ... in terms of what I'd call proper training," Jensen said. "Human relations, active listening, understanding the culture."

Working in corrections is the first step out of the training academy for new recruits — a rung on a ladder rather than a final stop. However, the LASD careers portal does not list corrections anywhere in the description for its academy training.

"Just looking at the way that LAPD and LASD do training, the correctional piece is very small," Jensen said. "Most of the training is post-certified law enforcement training. The corrections is an afterthought, or a necessary evil."

The lawsuit filed against L.A. County alleges that the nurses and correctional officers who took care of Thomas during his time at Twin Towers engaged in "deliberate medical negligence."

Medical negligence has been a well-documented cause of illness and death for Black Americans for decades. The specifics vary, but the circumstances bear similarities to the last hours of Thomas' life — communication barriers, racist stereotypes, and distrust dating back to the Tuskegee Experiment.

Marc Glidden, a political science assistant professor at CSUN who specializes in corrections, said that at a facility like Twin Towers — and at many other jails across America — any inmate who needs more than basic care may struggle to get it.

"If we're going to talk about access to healthcare among inmates, it's more dire that we talk about access within jails, especially county jails," Glidden said. "It's not just L.A. County, it's nationwide."

Incarceration is a behemoth institution with over 2 million

people in American prisons as of 2019. Twin Towers looms over them all as one of the largest jails in America. In 2019, the average length of a stay in an L.A. County jail was 60 days.

"Historically, people weren't supposed to spend more than a year there," Jensen said. "It was set up to be very temporary, for better or for worse. If you've got constantly changing populations, and you've got changing deputies who are in the jails, at best you're in a holding pattern."

In 1974, an inmate in Texas was injured when a 600-pound bale of cotton fell on him during a work assignment. The inmate, J.W. Gamble, went through a revolving door of doctors and diagnoses.

The case, *Estelle v. Gamble*, went to the Supreme Court, which ruled in an 8-to-1 decision that the prison failed to properly treat Gamble. The case solidified that even when someone is in a jail or a prison, they are entitled to humane medical treatment.

Although the Supreme Court has ruled that inmates are entitled to medical treatment, the ruling is not always upheld. In 2015, L.A. County settled two medical malpractice wrongful death lawsuits for over \$300,000, both involving medical neglect. In 2018, the county settled another medical malpractice lawsuit surrounding negligence for nearly \$6 million.

"I don't want to say medical needs aren't a priority, but they aren't the biggest priority," Glidden said. "They're worried about so many other things upon entry into a jail system."

In her deposition, Onyiah repeatedly stated that she had 100 other inmates to see during her pill call. Thomas never signed a medical refusal form because Onyiah was still unfinished with her pill call for the morning.

"At what point do things start slipping?" Jensen said. "People slip through the cracks, whether people want them to or not."

Jensen described a medical environment well behind the technological advances seen in hospitals like UCLA and Kaiser Permanente, where digitized records allow nurses and doctors to be more aware of the

patients they are caring for.

"Ideally, they should have everything on a prisoner easily accessible in a digitized chart, including misconduct and everything else," Jensen said. "I am quite confident that none of that is working particularly well, if at all, in the jail system."

Jensen was unsure how the case would end. It faces a long road and a complicated legal battle.

"I think Quinten's supporters are going to be disappointed," she said. She paused. "I hope I'm wrong. Regardless of Quinten's decisions, he didn't deserve to die in jail."

Saharra White, Thomas' partner, and the legal team representing his daughter Ashanti face an uphill battle in getting the jury trial they want, but they feel a responsibility to hold the Sheriff's department accountable for what happened to him.

"I will not let them get away with it," White said. "No matter how much they try to make me seem like the bad person or make him seem like the bad person, how much they try to cover up their wrongs, you cannot clean dirt with water. You only make mud."

The L.A. County Sheriff's Department did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

"If we're going to talk about access to healthcare among inmates, it's more dire that we talk about access within jails, especially county jails," Glidden said. "It's not just L.A. County, it's nationwide."

Five misconceptions about policing in America

By Shannon Carter
News Editor

Since the killing of George Floyd, policing has been the focus of more public attention than in any other time in recent history. Through the use of cellphones, social media and protests against police brutality, the unprecedented attention toward policing has sparked national conversations about defunding, overall training, the use of force and even the need to abolish law enforcement altogether.

To make informed decisions about law enforcement's value in our society and in order to rebuild the trust between the police and the public, neither party can hold on to stereotypical views of the other. Therefore, we must flesh out the myths, ask the appropriate questions and engage in meaningful dialogue to drive change.

These are some of the most common misconceptions about policing in America:

1. Police officers have a duty to protect us.

After the 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida, where a teen gunman opened fire at his former high school and killed 17 and injured another 17 individuals, a group of students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School filed a lawsuit against the county, claiming that the officials should have done more to protect them.

A federal district judge threw the case out, ruling that neither the school nor sheriff's deputies had a constitutional duty to protect students who were not in the custody of the state. Meaning, cops only have a constitutional duty to protect individuals who are imprisoned or are involuntarily committed to a mental institution. In addition, the constitution and state laws do not impose a duty to protect individuals from harm, even if they know a crime will occur.

"Police can watch someone attack you, refuse to intervene, and not violate the Constitution," said Darren L. Hutchinson,

a professor and associate dean at the University of Florida School of Law, in a 2018 interview with the New York Times.

In essence, the court ruled that the primary purpose of the police is to protect society as a whole and not the individual members of that society. This jarring reality changes the narrative that we hold of law enforcement in this country and warrants a reexamination of policing in America.

2. Police spend most of their time solving crime.

The ongoing discussion over the value of law enforcement has caused some to argue that police officers are not as successful at solving violent crime as some people think.

Research has found that law enforcement doesn't have the best track record for solving crime. According to a 2017 FBI Uniform Crime Reporting program, 70% of robberies, 66% of rapes, 47% of aggravated assaults and 38% of murders go unsolved each year. When it comes to

Protesters march past L.A. City Hall on June 17, 2020. Photo by Christopher Torres



property-related crimes, nearly 54% of crimes were never solved.

The Los Angeles Times found that out of 18 million calls logged by the Los Angeles Police Department since 2010, only 8% were reports of violent crimes, while the majority of 911 calls were recorded as “minor disturbance,” such as noise disturbances, civil disputes and traffic collisions.

While law enforcement supporters state that less than half of serious violent felonies are reported to the police, it's no doubt that the public expects police officers to be more successful at solving violent crimes.

3. Training prepares police for even the hardest parts of the job.

Last year's widespread criticism of law enforcement around the country has called for some critics to point out officer training as part of the problem and potentially part of the solution.

Across the country, California is one of only 13 states to require officers to have training before working on the job.

Based on California law, police officers must complete at least 664 hours of Peace Officer Standards and Training. That is less than six months of training.

Refresher training is required, however, this occurs in intervals of two to five years. For example, officers in California are required every two years to attend a two-hour de-escalation training and four hours of racial profiling and diversity training every five years.

But in order to get a cosmetology license in the state, people are required to go through 1600 hours of training.

A 2020 report by the Institute for Criminal Justice Training Reform looked at over 100 countries and found that the U.S. had among the lowest police training hours required. According to the report, countries like Finland, Germany and Australia, require more than 3000 hours of training to be an officer.

Experts at the Institute for Criminal Justice Training Reform believe that through

more robust officer training programs, police will be more equipped to deal with issues such as crowd control without the use of violence, de-escalation during high-pressure situations and helping officers understand their own implicit biases.

In addition, job-related stresses along with the lack of psychological therapy are other contributing factors that leave police officers ill-equipped to handle their jobs.

Research shows that police officers are at high risk of stress-related illnesses such as heart problems, post-traumatic stress disorder, insomnia and suicide. Cops get to see things that most people will never have to see. It's the kind of job that isn't for everyone and frankly, not everyone should be a cop.



Protesters gather at Father Serra Park to meet prior to the march demanding justice for the death of Breonna Taylor in Los Angeles, Calif., on Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020. Photo by Christopher Torres

4. The police can effectively help with mental health crises.

According to the Washington Post database of fatal U.S. shootings by on-duty police officers, more than 1 in 5 people shot and killed by police had a mental illness of some kind. And a study by the National Alliance on Mental Illness found that nearly 15% of men and 30% of women arrested and booked into jails have a serious mental health condition.

Unfortunately, law enforcement has become the first responders to mental health emergencies, which inadvertently ends up criminalizing mental illness; because many law enforcement officers are not properly trained to respond to a behavioral health crisis and will arrest the individual as opposed to providing them with the proper treatment.

Some police departments follow Crisis Intervention Training models, which is a first-responder method that uses crisis intervention training to help individuals with mental disorders or addictions rather than placing them in the criminal justice system due to illness-related behaviors. The program calls for 40 hours of training in areas of mental health diagnoses and verbal de-escalation skills.

Advocates for CIT state that police departments around the country appear to be reluctant to use these programs or ignore training protocols altogether.

A 2019 study in the Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law found that police crisis intervention teams have minimally helped to reduce arrests among people with mental

illnesses. The study also showed that CITs have failed to significantly de-escalate and reduce the violent risks that may occur during emergency police interactions.

5. Black Americans want less police presence in their communities.

A 2020 Gallup poll found that 81% of Black Americans want the police presence in their communities to stay the same or to increase.

While Black Americans have a less favorable view of local cops, as only a third believe that police in their communities do a good job, most want police presence maintained if not increased in their communities and more importantly they want the quality of those police interactions to improve.

Gallup also reported that only 22% of Black Americans are in favor of abolishing police departments, however nearly 90% want specific reforms that are “aimed at improving police relations with the communities they serve and preventing or punishing abusive police behavior.”

The data shows that Black people are not a monolith. Their opinions vary on this complex topic. However, most support a fair and equitable criminal justice system.

Defund the police

By Blake Williams
Opinion Editor

The United States of America was founded on the idea that all people are created equal and that life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are rights guaranteed to all people, but the country has yet to guarantee that to its citizens.

From slavery to unequal rights for women and significant amounts of income inequality, the U.S. has not held up its end of the bargain. While progress has been made, the country still has a lot of work to do if it truly wants to guarantee those rights to everyone.

The U.S. now has another major question to answer as calls to defund — and even abolish — law enforcement have increased as the state of policing has come into question over the past year.

History of police brutality

Police in the U.S. kill around 1,000 people every year, which is a rate far higher than any other country, according to a 2020 study from Prison Policy. The study shows that 33.5 civilians per 10 million are killed by police every year in the U.S., which is more than three times the rate police kill civilians in Canada, the country with the next highest rate at 9.8 per 10 million.

Police are also killing people of color at disproportionate rates. Black Americans are killed at nearly 2.5 times the rate that white Americans are killed and Hispanics are killed at just less than two times the rate, according to a study from the Washington Post that tracked police killings since 2015.

Overall, law enforcement in the U.S. has killed 5,836 people since 2015, according to the Washington Post's research.

There are a lot of factors at play for why it keeps happening and it will continue to happen until they are addressed.

To start with, police in the U.S. are highly militarized departments that of-

ten look like they are ready for war with the communities they are supposed to serve. This is thanks to the 1033 program that was part of the 1997's National Defense Authorization Act.

The program has given more than \$7 billion worth of weapons from the U.S. Department of Defense to nearly 10,000 law enforcement agencies, including grenade launchers, bayonets and armored vehicles, according to the ACLU.

In 2015, then-President Barack Obama issued an executive order that attempted to make it harder for police departments to acquire military weapons, but the restrictions were too narrow and offered too many loopholes.

At the time, there were at least 1,300 military vehicles being used by police and only 126 were recalled by the executive order. After the vehicles were recalled, 400 new ones replaced them, according to the ACLU. The only thing the executive order clearly did was ban equipment that was not in circulation or being transferred, such as weaponized aircraft and .50 caliber firearms.

"The total number of items that were recalled represented less than a tenth of 1% of all 1033 equipment in circulation at the time," the ACLU wrote.

There are also the problems of gangs that promote abusing their communities within U.S. police departments. The most documented of such abuses are within the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department.

The problem of LASD gangs dates back to at least the 1970s, according to a 1992 report by Special Counsel James G. Kolts, and in 2020, a report from the Los Angeles County Inspector General said L.A. County Sheriff Alex Villanueva promotes a "code of silence" regarding the deputy gangs within his department.

There are at least 18 gangs in the LASD that have killed at least 19 people and litigation related to their cases has cost L.A. more than \$100 million, according to a comprehensive report by Knock LA.

Congresswoman Maxine Waters sent a letter to the U.S. Attorney General in July demanding that the Department of Justice investigate one of the LASD's gangs, which refers to themselves as the "Executioners."

California Attorney General Xavier Becerra also announced a state civil rights investigation into the LASD for allegations of excessive force.

"The California Department of Justice investigation comes on the heels of



allegations of excessive force, retaliation, and other misconduct, as well as a number of recently reported incidents involving LASD management and personnel," Becerra's office wrote in a news release.

The culture problems within police departments are also highlighted by the fact they are three times more likely to use excessive force against left-leaning protestors than right-wing protestors, according to The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project.

This country guarantees the right of freedom to protest, yet too often police abuse protestors and shoot them with "less-lethal" projectiles and face no punishment. Thanks to the work of activists and journalists, it is easy to find countless cases of police violence at protests against people who are exercising their First Amendment right.

The U.S. is often quick to condemn the abuse of protestors in other countries but always fails to condemn it in our own country.

There is also the problem of police



brutality that does not get reported and does not result in the death of a person, such as chokeholds and punching. Police abuse has become so common that the United Nations human rights experts issued a statement calling for an end to the rampant police brutality across the world.

“We have repeatedly voiced our concern over a steady increase in the use of excessive force, police brutality, and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, as well as arbitrary detention, against predominantly peaceful protesters in all regions of the world,” the experts said.

Police officers are rarely held accountable because of qualified immunity, which protects government officials from civil lawsuits. Only 1.7% of officers who kill someone are charged with a crime and less than 0.3% are convicted of a crime, according to Mapping Police Violence.

In 2018, Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote that qualified immunity allows officers

to “shoot first and think later.”

When an officer is actually held accountable for their actions, it becomes the national story that dominates headlines because it is such a shock to society. It is insane that we are shocked by justice. We saw this happen with the Derek Chauvin trial after he murdered George Floyd.

It is also important to note that Chauvin was only convicted of murder because of a citizen’s video that contradicted the original police report. If it wasn’t for that person recording what happened, Chauvin would still be on the police force today because the other officers that were at the scene did not stop the murder and tried to help Chauvin cover it up.

Police advocates often say if you just follow police orders you won’t get killed or that they’re only killing criminals so why should we care. However, both those claims are untrue and present problems.

To start, there is no correlation between levels of police violence and violent crime in America’s largest 50 cities,

according to Mapping Police Violence using data from 2013-2018. If the police were only killing violent criminals, there would be a clear correlation.

We also need to remember every person is innocent until they are proven guilty in court by a jury. The police do not have the right to determine if someone is a criminal and they absolutely do not have the right to determine if a person should be killed. When they kill someone, they are stealing that person’s constitutional right to a trial.

While it would likely help most people to follow police orders, that is not always possible for everyone, and those people do not deserve to lose their life because of it. People who are deaf or partially deaf might not be able to communicate with the officers and people who are dealing with mental illnesses might also not be able to fully cooperate with police orders.

This is highlighted by the fact that conservative estimates say at least 25% of people killed by law enforcement are individuals with serious mental illnesses,

according to the Treatment Advocacy Center. These people need help, not death.

There are also cases every year where police still end up shooting people who are following their orders. The most well-known recent case is when officer Eric Stillman shot and killed 13-year-old Adam Toledo while he had his empty hands in the air. At the time, Stillman had three misconduct complaints against him in five years, according to the Invisible Institute, but he was never disciplined.

Where do we go from here?

While the activist's dream of abolishing the police might work in a perfect world, we are far from a perfect world. The reality is we do need someone who can provide an armed response for the worst cases, but there are things we can do to make policing better and more accountable.

The first step is to end qualified immunity. If an officer takes someone's right to life or abuses a person, they must face justice, because right now it's just not happening.

Then we need to take a look at the leadership of each department and see who is being enabled to continue their violent treatment of citizens. This would also include prosecuting every officer who is involved in a deputy gang and everyone who helped cover it up.

It's also long past due to take a serious look at the police budget and reinvest some of their funding into other programs.

The U.S. spends nearly \$200 billion per year on policing and incarceration with most cities spending around 25-50% of their budget on policing, according to the Action Center on Race and the Economy. So when most people say defund the police, they mean to take some of that money and re-invest it into the community.

You might be saying, "Well, wouldn't there just be more crimes with fewer cops patrolling and protecting us?" Not exactly.

When New York police officers took a break from proactive policing in 2014-15, crime complaints actually dropped, according to a report from Nature. It is not a definitive answer because the sample size is small, but as the report points out, using those resources to police the community "diverts finite resources and attention away from investigative units,



Protesters march the streets of downtown Los Angeles behind an organizers truck to demand the justice for the death of Breonna Taylor in Los Angeles, Calif., on Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020. Photo by Christopher Torres

including detectives working to track down serial offenders and break up criminal networks. Proactive policing also disrupts communal life, which can drain social control of group-level violence."

The best way to reduce crime is by investing in the community. Funding education, after-school programs, and making sure every person has the necessities needed to live and the right to a job with a living wage would go much further to reduce crime rates than spending billions every year on policing does.

States with the highest graduation rates and states that make the most significant investments into higher education are the states that also have the lowest crime rates, according to Criminal Justice Research.

Crime also drops when people have access to the health care they need, according to a study published in Science Direct. The study looked at the expansion of Medicaid to adults from 2001 to 2008 and found it "led to an economically meaningful reduction in the rates of robbery, aggravated assault and larceny-theft."

The rate of police killing people with mental illnesses could also be reduced by having mental health professionals respond to those situations. This is being looked into in California through Assembly Bill 988, which would establish a hotline in California that people can call as an alternative to 911 for mental health crises.

Having trained experts to deal with

those situations would make the situation safer for everyone involved and provide better outcomes than a 25% chance of death for the people who are struggling.

One final point is that most police officers don't live in the city they serve, according to FiveThirtyEight. There is not much evidence that requiring police officers to work in their own communities would bring change, but it still makes sense to require them to serve their own communities as it could help them better understand the area and develop stronger relationships with the people they live near.

Being a police officer is not an easy job, but our society makes it even harder when we rely on them to do more than keep the peace and protect us.

As of now, police respond to mental health crises and domestic violence cases, shootings and robberies, they deal with drug problems, any unexpected thing that might come up and more. It is too much for any organization to deal with effectively.

Taking some of the police budgets and reinvesting it into other programs would lift the burden on police, allow us to hold cops to higher standards, from the leadership to the newest recruits, as we wouldn't need so many officers, and it would make the community safer and happier.

We can make policing better for everyone, we just have to be willing to do it.

School to Prison Pipeline

By RYANNE MENA
Managing Editor

In a time where the issue of policing has come to the surface in American society, some have shifted their focus to the issue of policing our schools, where children are criminalized.

The school-to-prison pipeline, “a disturbing national trend wherein children are funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice system,” according to the ACLU, targets children with learning or behavioral challenges, often coming from households of poverty, abuse, and neglect.

“Zero-tolerance” policies began in 1994 with the adoption of the Gun-Free Schools Act. This led to the widespread use of School Resource Officer programs in American public schools, according to Learning for Justice, and an increase in the number of students being suspended and expelled.

“The suspension rate for all students has nearly doubled

since the 1970s, and has increased even more for Black and Hispanic Students,” according to Vox.

Students of color are disproportionately affected by zero-tolerance policies, with Black students making up 31% of school-related arrests. “Students suspended or expelled for a discretionary violation are nearly three times more likely to be in contact with the juvenile system the following year,” according to the ACLU.

Students Deserve is a grassroots coalition of students, teachers, and parents from schools within the Los Angeles Unified School District, working towards justice in and beyond schools.

“We want schools to divest from criminalization and policing... We follow the lead of Black Lives Matter in demanding that our schools defund the police and defend Black life,” according to schoolsstudentsdeserve.com.

Students Deserve demands of defund-

ing the Los Angeles School Police Department were met with success on February 16, when the Los Angeles Unified Board of Education voted to keep police officers out of secondary school campuses, according to the Los Angeles Daily News.

The Board’s vote also takes \$25 million from LASPD’s budget, approved to be redirected towards a Black Student Achievement Plan. “The plan will focus on providing resources to 53 schools with high concentrations of Black students and low academic performance,” according to LA Daily News.

As the organizing efforts of Students Deserve has proven to be successful in the pursuit of justice in schools and beyond, their work isn’t over.

“The fight to Defund LA School Police must continue! We want to fully Defund LA School Police and invest all of that money and more into support for Black Students. We will announce next steps soon! Follow us on social media for up-to-the-moment updates!” according to Students Deserve.

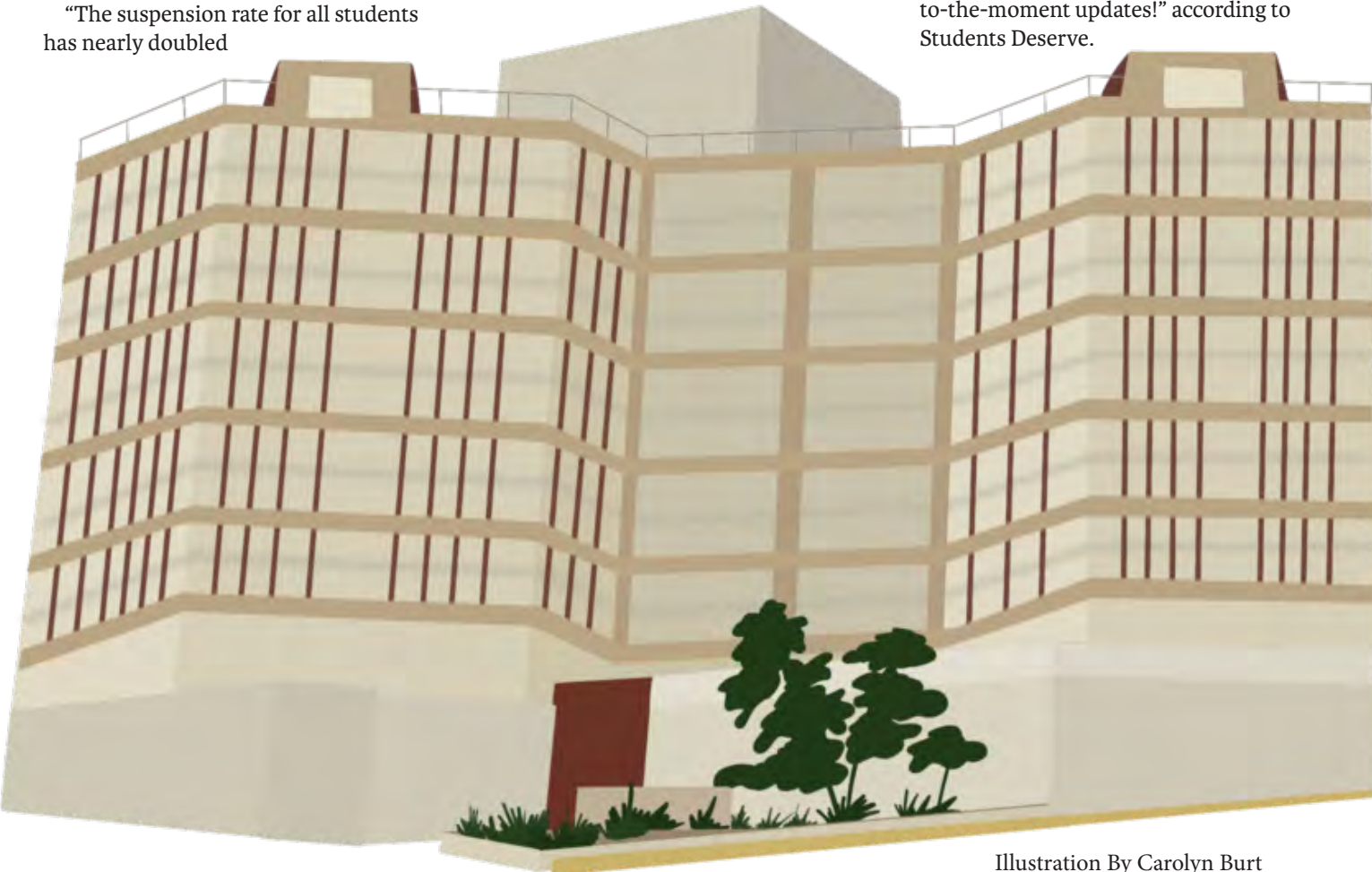


Illustration By Carolyn Burt

Q&A, Continued From Page 5

that particular piece of community input, and it creates a product where everybody has a stake in it. That's why we call them stakeholders.

Your appointment as interim Chief of Police comes at a crossroads with regard to the role of law enforcement in our country. People of color continue to unjustly lose their lives in interactions with police despite ongoing protests and calls for change, sparked most recently by the murder of George Floyd last May. Many CSUN students and various groups on campus have been very outspoken about their distrust in law enforcement as well. What are your thoughts on the movement and how do you plan on building trust with a campus who mostly backs that movement?

My position on that movement is it is a just movement. It's about holding police accountable to the community and that everybody gets treated the same way. That's what it's all about and that nobody is considered less than the other. So, we in law enforcement have to acknowledge, first off, that we have a lot of work to do, that we have failed in many ways to be good partners with our community, and now we have to work on building trust.

I feel that CSUN has a good foundation for that. We've always been a community-based police department and we've always received acknowledgment for that, but it doesn't mean that we don't have a lot of work to do because clearly, if the community doesn't believe it, it means nothing. So to that end, Chief [Gregory] Murphy, my predecessor, had already started working on various programs including a Police Advisory Committee, which contains multiple members from the community, including those that have been traditionally underrepresented or have had bad experiences with law enforcement.

So we are welcoming in that interaction to improve ourselves, and to try to be a better partner with our community. At the end of the day, those are the people that will make their decisions on whether we have been successful in rebuilding

that trust. So, we have a lot of work, I acknowledge it, but we're eager to roll up our sleeves and be part of the solution.

When helping a student who may be experiencing either a sexual assault situation and or a situation like a mental health crisis, the police department may be notified and asked to help. What do you see as the university police department's role in situations like that?

So our first and foremost role is immediately the care of the victim. It's always the victim first. We need to make sure that the victim's physical and emotional well being has to be taken care of immediately. So that is our first role. The next role is to ascertain if it's something

it's a particular individual and it might not be. Each one's different. Every case is different, but it's that kind of thing that keeps us moving out.

In regards to mental health, law enforcement has traditionally been the first people that you call to go assist with someone that is having a mental crisis. So we are relooking at that this year, and we're right now in the process of setting up a partnership with the University Counseling Service, where we will be hopefully approaching the aspect of students who need immediate intervention to go to the hospital or whatnot. This way is more based on dealing with their emotional needs, by having that partnership with specially trained officers, along with mental health professionals that will respond to those crises in the moment and deal with it in a very humane and caring manner.

Lastly, most of the campus community will be back in person this upcoming academic year. How do you plan on interacting with the student body?

So as I told you earlier, we have the police advisory committee that we're working very closely with to hopefully have some engagement opportunities. The campus as a whole is working on multiple other options to try to figure out campus climate with regards to police. Those things are in the works, and then finally at the end of the day, it's going to be our police officers, engaging the community being out there day in and day out being not only approachable so that

you want to talk to them, but trying to talk to everybody as we go out there. That is the goal for the police department.

So we have a lot of ideas and we're excited about them, but we're not just going to take our own ideas. We're going to take the ideas from other people that are reviewing how we work and we're going to listen to them on how they want us to approach because the fact of the matter is that we can think we're doing a great job, but the community is the judge. We need to make sure that we're doing the things that they think we should be. We're pretty excited about some of these engagement opportunities and the opportunity to show the community that we are good partners.



Alfredo Fernandez, the interim Chief of Police at CSUN, stands in the Police Services building. Chief Fernandez has been part of the CSUN Police Department for more than 25 years, which makes him the longest tenured member of the department. Photo by Christopher Torres

that just occurred. What's the threat to the campus community? Can we capture the individual that that committed the crime? So, that's our next move we need to absolutely be involved in trying to apprehend that criminal.

Then the third thing is if we can't apprehend that criminal, it's notifying the community of a potential threat to the campus and to our campus communities and make sure that this doesn't occur again. Now keep in mind, most sexual assaults are not lying and waiting for some scary individuals. Most sexual assaults occur from people we know. So, generally speaking, a lot of times we know that there might be a sexual predator out there, but it might be directed if

By Michaella Huck
Print Editor

Depression and PTSD in the Black community is an issue faced by many throughout our community and is seldom discussed. The beginning of the new year was the lowest point in my life and I've never really opened up about it. For a year and a half of my life, I was in a physically and mentally abusive relationship. That all changed in early March, when my ex-boyfriend physically abused me and broke my windshield in a gas station parking lot.

Luckily, bystanders witnessed the altercation and called the police. However, when the police arrived was when things got worse. The first person they saw was me. They pointed guns at me and yelled, "Get on the floor, get on the floor." I was already shaken up so it was hard for me to think... I stood there frozen and started to cry. The witnesses told me everything would be okay and told me to get down as I laid on the floor, they detained my abuser.

After everything was sorted out and they had him in custody, they apologized for the inconvenience. While the apology seemed less than sincere, I was then gaslighted. The police could not arrest him on their own because they did not witness the altercation. While I was the victim in the situation, they said things like, "this happens often but, the girls always go back anyway," this was followed by the officers chuckling amongst themselves. This caused my social anxiety to rise and I called my mom crying and I asked her for guidance on the event.

I ended up signing the private person's arrest. However, when it came to the police the situation was not handled properly. Victims of violence should never feel like they are the issue because in this instance my voice was not being heard and for months after what happened, I constantly had dreams about the police approaching me with guns like they did that day.

It is very important officers take initiative to be unbiased in situations of violence because the negative impact on mental health from not only the abuse but, also the police encounter was something that lies with me even to this day.

Too Close for Comfort is a section where our audience and editors give first hand accounts of issues that relate to them. If you have a story about navigating through pandemic thats too close for comfort please email us at toocloseforcomfort.sundial@gmail.com.

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