

Seven shots in the back



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By Nate Smelle

Waking up just before sunrise on Monday morning to the singing of Black-capped chickadees, I switched on the news, put on a pot of coffee, grabbed my pen and notepad, and strolled out onto the porch with the intention of finishing up the fluffy editorial I had started writing last Wednesday. By the time the coffee was ready and I took a seat outside, all thoughts of fluff had drifted away like pollen on the winds of change trumpeting from the speakers on my television.

“Jacob Blake, an unarmed 29-year-old Black man is in serious condition after being shot in the back seven times by police in Kenosha, Wisconsin on Sunday?”

Watching the unedited video online shortly after hearing the revolting report, one can see Blake, who was allegedly on the scene breaking up a fight between two women, turn his back on the officers and head back towards the driver's side of his vehicle. At this time, two of the three officers on the scene pursue Blake as he walks slowly back to the minivan where his three children were waiting. As Blake attempts to get into the vehicle, one of the officers grabs him by the shirt from behind, and then seven shots can be heard.

From how it appears on the video, both officers shot Blake in the back at point-blank range in front of his children.

We are talking about three armed men against one unarmed man here folks. Even if he was threatening the police, which he clearly was not, there was no need for the use of deadly force.

At any moment leading up to the shooting, the officers could have apprehended Blake without firing a single potentially lethal shot, let alone the seven that were fired into his back.

Believe me, as a journalist who has been shot with rubber bullets, pepper sprayed, and tear gassed for pointing his camera in the “wrong” direction, there were many other non-lethal options these officers had if they felt it was necessary to use force to apprehend Blake. So, the question is “why didn't they?” Why, instead of shooting him in front of his children, didn't the three officers use their physical strength to overpower and handcuff him? Certainly that was the safest and most humane course of action for all involved.

Now, as Jacob Blake lays paralyzed from the waist down in a hospital bed in Milwaukee, Kenosha has become the epicenter of a

nationwide wave of protests demanding racial justice and equal rights. In the words of minister, and human rights activist Malcolm X, "I believe that there will ultimately be a clash between the oppressed and those that do the oppressing. I believe that there will be a clash between those who want freedom, justice and equality for everyone and those who want to continue the systems of exploitation."

That belief now appears to be becoming a reality.

As with the killing of George Floyd, Eric Garner, Breonna Taylor, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Laquan McDonald, Botham John, Jamar Clark, Stephon Clark, Philando Castile, Alton Sterling, Freddie Gray, or Walter Scott, millions of people around the world have witnessed the shooting of Jacob Blake. Recognizing that this shooting was by no means an accident, as engaged witnesses we again now all have a responsibility to take action against racism. Racial violence and police brutality are not just American problems - they are the byproducts of a vile disease we call hate. As Canadians we are not immune to the deadly ugliness of this dysfunctional and evil way of thinking towards and treating other human beings. Yet, we continuously look the other way.

For example, why is it that there have been more people raising a fuss locally about someone spray painting the words "This is Native Land," and the words "Black Lives Matter," than there have been people upset about the defacing of "Black Lives Matter" and "United against Racism" signs with anti-Semitic and homophobic graffiti?

No matter what colour our skin may be, what country we come from, what God or planet we consider sacred, we are all human beings and we are all in this together. We can no longer bury our heads in the sand and pretend that systemic racism does not exist. It must, if we are to earnestly define ourselves as a fair and just society, be snuffed out now.