

tives of the ruling elite and they are felt to be threatening by the dominant white bloc of US society. The racial terror against African Americans seeks to ensure that we remain immobilized and disorganized. As such, this violence and terror is not irrational. It is inhumane; violates our civil and human rights; but is not irrational.

The personal uncertainty and insecurity that so many white Americans felt and expressed post-September 11th terrorist attacks came as such a shock to the system...but not for African Americans. For African Americans, living with uncertainty is about living in the USA. Living with the reality that at any point and for any reason, we may be “mis-identified” by the authorities, and jailed or killed; we may be targeted for extra-judicial harassment and killings; we may be humiliated by the authorities, yet obtain no apologies. We may be otherwise silenced.

For these and many other reasons, the response to police and extra-judicial harassment and killings cannot be viewed in isolation. It is not the Trayvon Martin case, or the Eric Garner case, alone. It is the ability of the State and the larger white bloc to declare a cessation of the rule of law when it comes to the rights of the “darker races” generally, and African Americans in particular. Such a situation only exists when democracy is an illusion rather than a reality.

Bill Fletcher, Jr. is a racial justice, labor and global justice activist and writer. He is the host of “The Global African” on Telesur-English. He can be followed on Facebook and at www.billfletcherjr.com. This article was originally published on ZNet.



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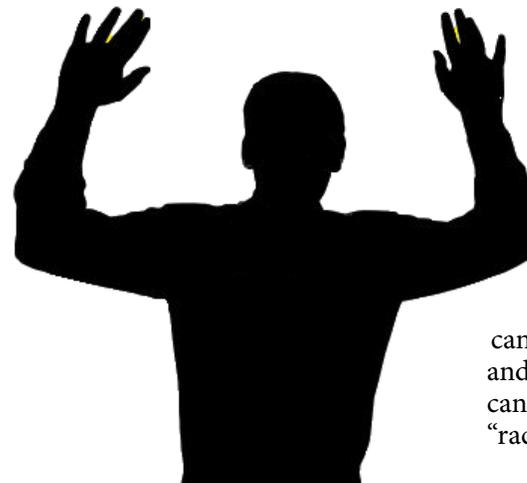
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Suspected for Being Black

by Bill Fletcher, Jr.

Each time there is a police or extra-judicial killing of an African American I have two immediate responses. One is intense anger at the absence of legitimate democratic rule in the USA exemplified by the ability of the State as well as hate groups, to snuff out the life of African Americans at will. The second response is the recognition that this is an experience of terror that envelops every person who is identifiably Black and, for that matter, other peoples who are of the “darker races.”

Two recent killings, one of Eric Garner in New York and Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, speak to a very different reality experienced by African Americans compared with whites in the USA. Without going through the details, there are certain questions that can be asked to anyone in the USA and, depending on the answer, one can ascertain what I would call the “racial terror index.”



DON'T SHOOT.

Here are a few examples:

- Are you generally afraid of the police?
- To what extent do you expect there to be a possibility that you will be stopped by the police? Have you ever been trained on how to respond if you have been stopped?
- If you were in a car that broke down, how likely are you to knock on someone's door seeking help?
- If you are man, how likely are you to drive long distances with a female of another "race"?
- If you had difficulty getting into your own home, how likely would you be to contact the police and ask for their help?
- How many neighborhoods do you need to be careful in transiting for fear that the police will stop you?

What white America largely misses is that there is a system of terror under which African Americans constantly live. It is not the terror of Al Qaeda but a terror that began with slavery and continued during the reign of the Ku Klux Klan. But it is also represented by lynchings and false arrests. It is truly terror because it can come at any time and be directed at any individual, but it also is the use of violence against civilians in order to advance a political objective. In that sense it is no different—in fundamentals—from a car bombing.

The racial terror we experience, and these recent examples at the hands of the police are nothing but the tip of the iceberg, frequently seem inexplicable. The killing of Eric Garner, for instance, took place where Garner was in a chokehold and was yelling out that he could not breathe. There is a very simple question: when the police heard this, why did they not ease up? Garner was unarmed. Where was the threat?

Let's take an extra-judicial killing: Trayvon Martin in Florida. Here we had a situation where a non-African American alleged that he felt threatened by a young, unarmed African American. He felt so threatened that he believed that he could justify shooting and killing this young African American; not wounding or scaring off, but killing.

Let's think about this situation differently. If there is any segment of US society that should justifiably feel in constant fear it is Black America. The history of our experiences with violence in North America are well documented. There is no equivalent usage of violence between African Americans and White Americans. The violence is overwhelmingly one-sided. Whites may fear African Americans, largely due to racial impressions



and stereotypes, but African Americans have an historical justification to fear nearly any contact with white authorities and with much of the white population.

Given this reality, under what conditions would African Americans be considered to have mainstream white support—and justification—in killing whites who we believe are threatening us? This may sound like a strange question, but consider possibilities such as:

- You, as a white person, suffer an auto accident and knock on the door of an African American. Perhaps you are frantic because you need to get somewhere. Perhaps you are scared. Can an African American shoot you out of fear?
- You, as a white person, insult a Black police officer. Can that Black police officer choke you to death because s/he feels threatened?
- You, as a white person, are driving from one state to another. A black woman asks to ride with you. Do you have to worry about being pulled over by Black police or by Black extra-judicial groups threatening your life?

The racial terror that we experience is not about abstract hatred but is about assuring the larger society that we shall not constitute any threat. In that sense, it is preemptive; preemptive in the sense that the demands by Black America for consistent democracy are antithetical to the objec-