

Dead Blacks, White Cops, and Political Cover

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Taking No Prisoners Blog

October 20, 2009

They buried Vionique Valnord last week.

She was 33, had a five year old daughter, and had stepped into the street to hail a cab after a wedding at the church where her father was the minister when she was run down by a speeding, meandering Jeep driven by a drunken white cop named Andrew Kelly. She was alive when her body bounced to the ground and Kelly the cop – whom associates describe as a caring guy – probably would have stopped to help if she had been a stray dog.

But she wasn't. She was a Black woman bleeding in the gutter. So Kelly and his white, policeman drinking buddy, Michael Downs, ran away and left her to die. Internal Affairs caught up with the pair, of course. But those white officers gave Kelly water and breath gum – and didn't bother taking a breathalyzer because, well, he was a white kop and the woman was just another Black lying dead in the street.

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly showed up at the wake to express their regrets. As expected.

But as her sister, Lisa Narcisse, demanded: “Don't just come and pay your respects – what are you going to do about it?”

And the answer to that is as simple and stark as a chalk outline on a dark street.

Nothing.

It's not as if this was the first time that the NYPD had shown a callous disregard for a black life. In May, Omar Edwards, a black policeman who was, at the time, off duty, was gunned down by a white officer who assumed that any black man chasing a white man had to be a criminal.

The reality was that Officer Edwards was chasing a suspected thief who was white. But Officer Andrew Dunton didn't know that. All he saw was the color, and gunned Edwards down.

The Mayor and Chief Kelly came to the wake and said it was a tragedy. Patrick Lynch, the head of the Policemen's Benevolent Association, said it was a tragedy and added gratuitously that it was too bad that Officer Edwards turned towards Officer Dunton while holding a gun in his hand.

The Medical Examiner said the Black Officer was shot in the back – which put the lie to Dunton's excuse for the killing – but that didn't change anything as far as the mayor, the police commissioner, or the cops' union was concerned. It was a white cop shooting a black man and, well, that's the way it should be.

One could say there were problems with training, and there might be. One could say the streets are dangerous and cops have to make difficult, split-second, life and death decisions. That's true and they are justifiably commended for the risks they take and the responsibilities they assume. But how is it that black officers, who took the same training, worked the same precincts, faced the same life and death situations on the same dark, dangerous streets never accidentally killed a white cop?

Something else must be at work here.

To understand their attitude, go back a bit to the shooting of officers Russel Timoshenko and Herman Yan in July, 2007 by three black men. Timoshenko would die of his wounds, while Yan recovered. There is no excusing criminals – whatever their color. Anyone who would gun down a cop would just as soon gun down the average unarmed citizen. That’s why we have police, to protect the majority of us from the small minority of predators among us, regardless of who they are.

But they should be protecting all of us. Equally.

But Lynch and the PBA do not see it that way. Lynch was all over the news before, during, and after the March, 2009 trial loudly and regularly proclaiming that these three “animals” needed to be brought to justice. Animals. It was his favorite description. And it fit his view of black men.

His flagrant dehumanization of the three gunmen was never challenged by Mayor Bloomberg or Commissioner Kelly; never challenged by editorial writers in the city’s “mainstream” newspapers or television stations. The gunmen were Black and, therefore, in the world of white city cops and the institutions supporting them, the term “animals” was appropriate.

Which brings us back to the quick death of black Officer Edwards, and the slower death of Ms. Valnord, who bled to death in the gutter, next to her five year old daughter and in front of her father’s church. It brings us to PBA Chief Lynch and company throwing their arms around their errant, hard-drinking officers, insisting on patience and due process and the right not to be tested for drugs or alcohol. It brings us to a department where the prevailing ethic is one of white men with badges and guns who view their mission as keeping Black people in check and killing the “animals” who get out of line.

Which means there is a term for Mayor Bloomberg and Police Commissioner Kelly; a term for the other politicians who mutter pieties while turning a blind eye to the open, lethal racism permeating the New York City Police Department; a term for Lynch and the police union brass who dehumanize blacks and justify every white cop’s depravity.

The term is Liars.