

Commentary: Why is Jonathan Price dead prematurely? Racism.

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Jonathan Price and I lifted weights together during our time at Hardin-Simmons University. I didn't know him well, but I knew him well enough to know he was a good man and a kind soul. I knew him well enough to see the world is worse off without him, and I know the world well enough to see this tragedy isn't as hard to understand as some make it.

While I appreciate our alma mater dedicating a chapel service and the following panel discussion to Jonathan Price, I wish HSU President Eric Bruntmyer made a more pointed statement in his op-ed by calling out racism.

Why is Jonathan Price dead prematurely? Racism.

His death follows an obvious pattern of police killings of unarmed Black people across the country that isn't going away or abetting. The statistics don't lie. Failing to name the problem and address it exacerbates it and leaves our Black friends and all friends of color in harm's way.

Lives are on the line.

Shaun Lucas is the police officer charged with Jonathan's murder. Perhaps the most controversial thing I'll say isn't that racism is a real and present danger, but that I doubt Lucas is any worse a person than I am.

He may be no more racist than you and me and all who are raised in America, inundated with the racist stereotypes we absorb from movies, TV,

news and politicians.

Racism plays out in systems

American individualism and bootstrap mythology give us no adequate lens through which to see and understand the way racism plays out in systems—like American media, higher education, politics and the American police force.

Lucas is a racist in the sense that he is actively involved in a system that consistently produces racist outcomes by sending outrageous numbers of Black people and people of color to prison for crimes their white counterparts commit with more frequency.

Lucas is a racist in the sense that he is actively involved in a system that consistently produces racist outcomes by killing at least twice as many unarmed Black people as white people, according to the most conservative estimates.

Lucas is a racist in the same sense that almost all of us are racist, because we also participate in systems that consistently produce racist outcomes in regard to housing, lending, zoning, gerrymandering, redlining and education.

Jonathan Price is dead, because these systems always have and always will produce racist outcomes. As long as they exist in their present forms, they will continue to lead to the loss of livelihood and of life for Black, Indigenous and people of color.

Address racism in the system

Jonathan Price is a victim of these systems.

Blaming Shaun Lucas is warranted. He is charged with murder, but the problem is far larger than the actions of one police officer.

Whether Lucas is found guilty or not, he was fired from his station. He'll never be an officer again, yet we can say with certainty it's only a matter of time before another police killing of another unarmed Black person will be in the headlines.

The problem isn't only the bad actions of individuals, but the results of the system.

The American police force will continue to produce these outcomes even without Lucas and many like him. Blaming only individuals is like taking Advil for a headache while pretending the brain tumor isn't there.

There is a cancer in our country, and it is racism. It is killing our friends, and it must be cut out at its roots before it kills our nation.

Addressing racism calls us to think beyond rugged individualism and to work together to reform and/or dismantle the systems that produce racist outcomes.

It is not enough not to be a racist ourselves.

Racist systems produce racist outcomes even without maliciously racist individuals, and we are complicit in these outcomes when we fail to name them what they are: racist.

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