

OUR VIEW

Shoot First...

Seems that local law enforcement aren't the only police departments that have seen a rash of officer-involved shootings. According to WTOC Channel 11 in Atlanta, there have been 10 fatal police shootings death in DeKalb County this year. A website posting of a WTOC news report chronicles the latest incident: "Officers in DeKalb County spotted the stolen S-U-V and were chasing two suspects inside when the vehicle went out of control and the driver opened fire on them. Police say that left officers no choice but to return fire, killing the driver. The passenger was hospitalized. DeKalb County is on Atlanta's eastern side. So far this year it's had more fatal police shootings than New York City or Los Angeles. The interim chief of the DeKalb force blames it in part on loose southern gun laws and more aggressive criminals."

Authorities in Minneapolis are being scrutinized after a domestic violence call resulted in an officer fatally shooting 27-year-old Dominic Aries Felder. An article in the *Pioneer Press* notes that "two officers involved in the shooting were placed on administrative leave pending a review of the incident, which is standard procedure in such cases. The officers are Lawrence Loonsfoot and Jason King, both veterans of the department since 1993. No other gun was found at the shooting scene, police said. That fact fueled the conviction of relatives and a bystander that police acted with unnecessary force in killing Felder."

Tiana Wilson, a witness who says she's Felder's girlfriend and the mother of his child, told the *Press*, "They [police] pulled their guns out right away, and I said, 'Do not shoot, he's mental. He thought everybody was trying to kill him. He was just pacing back and forth.'"

"My brother was little. I don't see how he could even try to grab for their guns," Chanelle Felder told the *Press*.

And in Florida, St. John's County cops ended a massive manhunt for William Ashby by killing the 37-year-old murder suspect.

Closer to home, local police departments (namely Las Vegas Metro and North Las Vegas) are on pace for 30 officer-involved shootings by year's end.

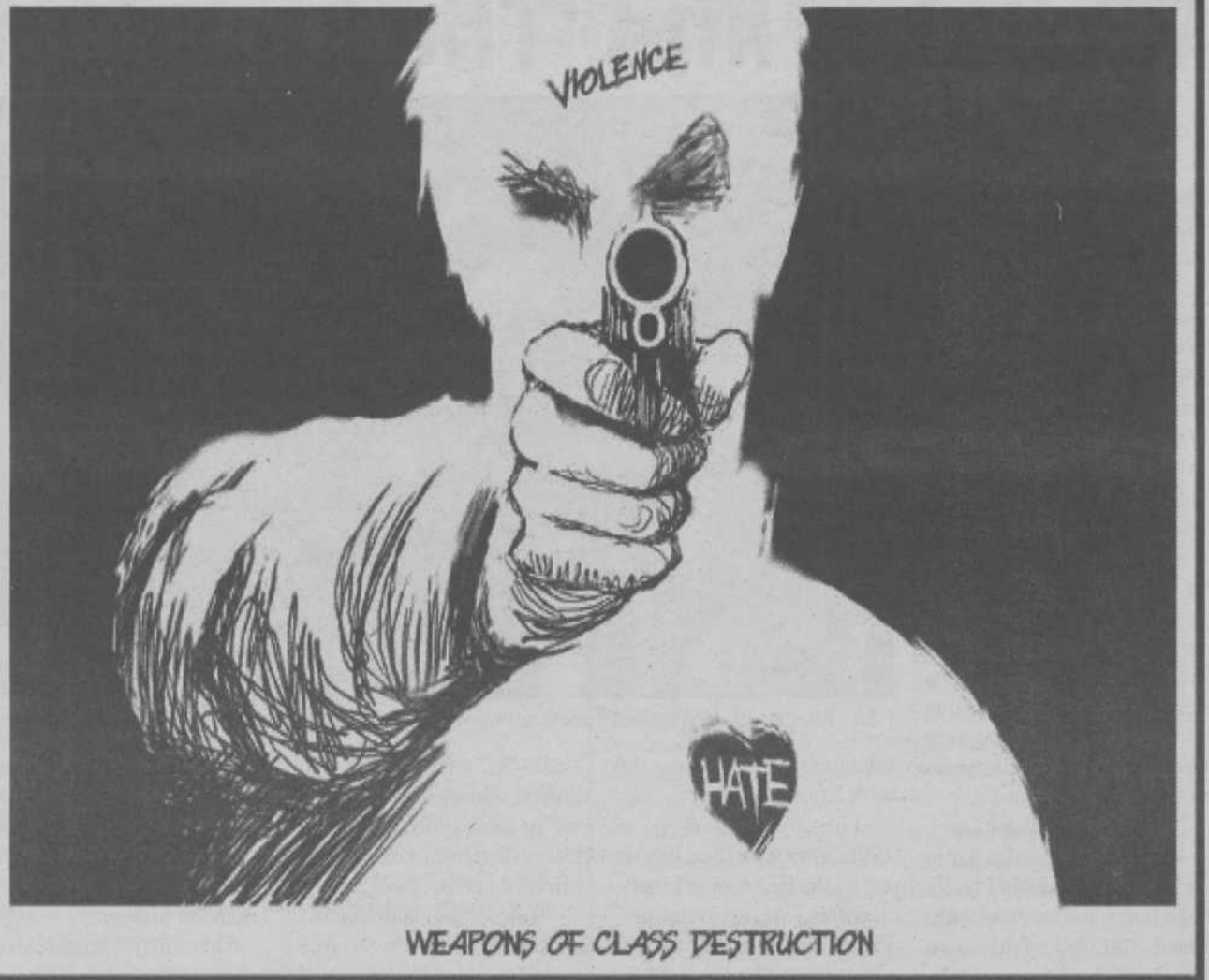
No one will argue that police work isn't dangerous work. In doing that work, it is understood that from time to time, you might have to shoot or kill a suspect. And there's certainly more than a grain of truth to the assertion that officers are outmanned and outgunned. But the one thing officers have over the criminals is training. They're trained to use force only when necessary and to only use enough force to quell the threat.

But when cases like that of Swuave Lopez come up—handcuffed inside a squad car, the 17-year-old murder suspect escaped and was fleeing when he was shot in back and killed—it raises questions about what is reasonable force. When cops fire 600 shots—yes 600—during a February standoff with a gun-wielding Christopher Hawkins, it raises questions about what reasonable force is. When five people have died from having Tasers used on them in the past two year, it raises questions about what's taught in the police academy. Is it to serve and protect—as it should be—or is it shoot first, ask questions later?

Get More Data

The 2002 legislation authorizing law enforcement agencies statewide to collect data on racial profiling was a good bill. It provided proof of what African-Americans in Clark County had long suspected: That we suffer from disproportionate treatment at traffic stops. We are stopped more often, searched more often and handcuffed more often than Whites and other minorities.

At the time the information was released, law enforcement officials expressed concern over the numbers and promised to do something to address racial profiling. Well, here we are four years later and no one knows what's been done. Has the problem gotten worse or have strides been made to eliminate it? We don't know because agencies haven't been forthcoming. So to alleviate any future problems, we're asking some brave lawmaker to sponsor a bill in 2007 mandating racial profiling studies every legislative biennium and for that information to be released. For safety's sake, we need to know.



Election time = hammer time

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

After the primary in Maryland, when Benjamin L. Cardin, a White Congressman, defeated Kweisi Mfume, the former president of the NAACP and ex-chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, African-American politicians almost stumbled over one another in a mad rush to endorse Cardin as the Democratic candidate for U.S. Senate. Democratic Sen. Barack Obama, everyone's flavor of the month, even parachuted in to endorse Cardin. He appeared on the scene so quickly that it was more as if they loaded him into a cannon and aimed him toward the Baltimore Harbor.

The sight of grinning Black elected officials rushing to endorse a White Democrat is a familiar scene. What made this bum rush so noteworthy was that after Mfume filed to fill an open Senate seat, the Democratic Party went out and recruited Cardin to run against him. With limited resources and lacking the support of party bosses, Mfume still came within nine percentage points of defeating Cardin. If he had won, Maryland's Senate race would have featured two African-Americans, guaranteeing that one would be elected to office.

I know for a fact that at



GEORGE E. CURRY

one point during the primary, Mfume was so disappointed with the professional Democrats that in the event he had lost the primary he contemplated endorsing Steele, the Republican candidate. When Mfume was chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, he demonstrated that kind of courage and boldness. I suspect that because Cardin is a friend and former colleague, Mfume decided not to bolt his party this time.

Still, it's the same old sorry story: Blacks get mistreated and after complaining about being taken for granted; they dutifully line up to pick cotton. Or, in this case, Black votes. I don't know what gets into Black leaders between the time they complain and the time the party selects its White nominee. As someone said about one prominent Black leader, "He's like a terrorist — all he wants is money and a plane."

It's time for a change and, clearly, that change is not going to come from Black

elected officials who are forever wedded to their Democratic overseers. The change, if it's to occur, must come from those not seeking the favor of either party. If we are truly tired of being taken for granted by one major party and just plain taken by the other, then it's time to take a stand.

Here's my modest proposal for my fellow Black Marylanders — teach both parties a lesson by voting for the Black Republican, Lt. Gov. Michael Steele. On the issue of affirmative action, Michael Steele is no Clarence Thomas. I disagree with Steele on most public policy issues. He is a Republican in every sense of the word.

But, like the voting in New Orleans, this is not about one person. It's larger than that. This is about demanding respect. And I can

think of no better way to get the attention of both parties than, in this one instance, voting Republican to make a point. Some party leaders may not be able to read and write, but they can count. If we do this, everyone will have to do some different kind of figuring. Republicans will have an incentive to court the Black votes, and Democrats will have to work in earnest to earn the respect of African-Americans.

Blacks make up 29 percent of Maryland's population. That's the fifth-highest percentage in the country. Among registered voters, about one in five Maryland voters is an African-American. That, combined with an expected lower turnout in this non-presidential election, means that African-Americans can determine who wins or loses. That's

(See Curry, Page 11)

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