



Tamir Rice

by Carrie Kuba

Image Credit: madison365.com

On Monday, December 28th, a grand jury ruled not to indict the police officers involved in the shooting death of 12-year-old Tamir Rice. Like so many others, I found myself overcome with sadness and frustration.

How did this happen?

Again?

This is not justice. This is privilege.

In the wake of yet another senseless tragedy, I poured through articles with fervor, including Supreme Court case -Graham vs. Connor -, the Constitutional litmus test by which police officers are evaluated as to their use of reasonable force in the line of duty. This was quoted by the prosecutors in the Tamir Rice with regard to a potential indictment.

However, because the Tamir Rice case was brought before a grand jury behind closed doors, we are left wondering how it was decided that shooting a 12-year-old boy,

within 2 seconds of contact,

within 7 feet of proximity,

is justified.

The problem with the Graham vs. Connor ruling is that “reasonable force” is a very non-specific and subjective term. In the case of Tamir Rice, did the officers create a situation of their own justified “reasonableness” by driving within seven feet of Tamir, and opening fire within two seconds? Was there no other option offered to them prior to those two seconds in which they could have de-escalated the situation? (For example, the way in which it was done not even a week later for a woman with a pellet gun in Connecticut; or Officer Daniels in Corvallis who was able to talk down a young woman holding a modified toy revolver and actually asked the officer to fire on her?)

Since the grand jury refused to indict, we will never get a chance to even explore the events leading up to the death of Tamir Rice. We will not be able to hear eyewitness testimony, including why a 911 call was made in an “open carry” state, - all the while knowing that even that is a stretch when the boy had a toy gun in his possession. We will never get to explore the record of the officers involved, nor the police department. We will never get a chance to allow a jury of peers to be given an opportunity to see that justice does indeed roll down after all the facts have come to light.

Instead, we get sound bytes from an over-eager county prosecutor who has been meticulous in creating the desired outcome of no responsibility whatsoever in the death of a 12-year-old boy. This allows for the very same situation to happen again and again and again with impunity.

Instead, we get even further polarization between those whose experience cannot relate to this scenario, and therefore are eager to believe no harm can be done by law enforcement, and those who are all too familiar with this scenario and are incredulous that yet again their reality has been so readily dismissed.

UNJUSTIFIED

Admitting, I fall into the former category.

As a Caucasian, I have the privilege to be able to explain away events like this. I tend to want to believe we can live in a post-racial world where something like this could not happen. I can find myself searching for the articles, Tweets, and social media that support my own perspective in which I can nitpick out certain phrases and sound bytes that assuage my own fears and show that perhaps it is justified - or, at the very least - questionable, with reasonable doubt.

This is what white privilege looks like.

This is implicit bias.

Confronting privilege and bias is a discipline. It is not something that I can overcome completely because I continually am the recipient of this privilege. Oftentimes, I do not even realize it as it can be subtle and nuanced. How I long to be rid of it. How I desire to humbly listen, validate, project the stories, move forward as a true ally.

However, this discipline is ongoing. There is no instantaneous cure, it means that when a brother or sister of color shares a personal story of injustice, I often have to deny my knee-jerk response that is prone to discount such a story because nothing like that has ever happened to me. I have to resist my urge to

just want to make it all better (which means making myself comfortable) by saying:

“Are you sure that is what happened?”

Whether I choose to silence that which makes me uncomfortable and therefore silence the narrative, or choose discipline and an uncomfortable quest for empathy, I do have a choice.

The fact that I have this choice is an example of privilege.

The fact that the justice system is able to do this is an example of privilege.

And therefore, in the case of

Tamir Rice -

justice has surely

NOT been served.



Carrie Kuba

Carrie Kuba has an undergraduate degree in English, and a Masters degree in Multicultural Education from Eastern University. She has taught ESL and Academic Reading at the high school and junior college level in various urban settings, as well as EFL overseas.

Carrie also founded a non-profit called Someone's Child that seeks to engage, educate, and empower families to combat human trafficking nationally and globally.

She is also a member of the Redbud Writers Guild.

Currently, one can find Carrie enjoying the beautiful diversity of her own family, which includes her Czech husband, her eldest biological daughter, Bella, who is a medically fragile kiddo, and her youngest daughter, Ethiopian Habesha, Abeni.

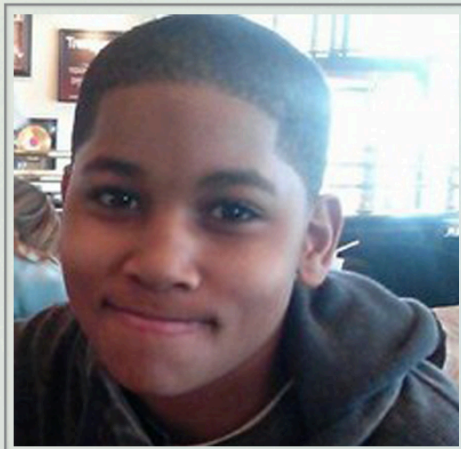


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