

OPINIONS

Where do we draw the line of duty?

As most of the Davidson College community has probably heard by now, our town was thrust into the limelight with the violent deaths of Officer Mark Swaney and resident Damon Kerns and the wounding of Sergeant Charlie McLean on Christmas Day. It has been difficult for many people to whom I have talked to accept the fact that such an event could take place in Davidson. It has been even more difficult for those of us who knew Mark Swaney.

Having known Mark and being friends with many other police officers — including Charlie McLean — who work at the College, in the Town of Davidson, and in other places, I have grown to have a great respect for these men and women who go out time and time again to put themselves at great risk to ensure our safety.

Unfortunately, accompanying this incident has been a swarm of people who insist on making this tragedy something that I believe it was not — a racially motivated incident. This wasn't about black versus white, this was about good versus bad.

The perpetrator in this incident had been in trouble with the law several times before; that's no secret. I have talked to a few people close to the incident who confirmed the fact that drugs were

tied into the incident — not necessarily as a direct cause, but they were a cause for the entire chain of events that took place.

The perpetrator was obviously not trying to scare Officer Swaney and Sergeant McLean, nor was he trying to get them to leave. Rather, he shot Officer Swaney through the throat and Sergeant McLean through the shoulder. (Presumably he was aiming for the head.)

I think his intentions were pretty clear.

Being the intelligent students that we are, students who are supposed to be learning about all aspects of life, let's make sure that we keep our eyes and attention focused on what really happened on Christmas Day. Am I denying that racial problems exist in today's society? Absolutely not.

simply bad acts, we can deal with them a little bit better.

Don't fool yourselves. What has happened, what is happening, is nothing short of pure evil. This was not a case of a black man shooting a white man because the white man called the black man a "nigger," or because the black man called the white man a "racist redneck." This was the case of a man shooting an officer of the law who was doing his job to defend the thousands of citizens that make up the town of Davidson and Davidson College.

I don't believe this is something that is going to be solved simply by us going to "the other side of the tracks." This goes beyond racial differences and economic status. This comes down to a gross

violation of everything we hold dear, including a respect for other people, responsibility to our community, and the appreciation of life itself.

While I commend those who are trying to prevent something like this from ever happening again by encouraging us to break down the wall of isolation between residents on both sides of the tracks, I believe that their solution for what has happened is misguided.

We should be focusing on the fact that there are people out there who make a conscious choice to breach the laws and guidelines that have been

set down by the government, by humanity, and (if you chose to believe) by God. We must rise up and say, "We will not tolerate such gross abhorrences, and acts like these will be met with swift and strong punishment."

We must strive to be better citizens of our community, our nation, and of our world by taking responsibility for our lives and respecting the lives of others.

Once that happens, many of our other problems - including racism and socioeconomic problems - will fall by the wayside.

This was what happened in the late afternoon of Christmas Day: nothing more and nothing less than the evil disregard of life.

There is no other explanation, nor is there any excuse.

When you are in class, going to bed, or having a good time down on the Court, remember that there are men and women who are out there like Officer Swaney and Sergeant McLean, many times in hostile conditions, who have sworn to protect you to the point of giving their own lives, not because of your ethnicity, religion or political beliefs, but because they care. From my heart I thank them all for the risks they are willing to take day in and day out. To the rest of us, may we never forget what happened here in Davidson on Christmas Day.

Sergeant McLean, if you're reading this, I thank you for the many years you gave to the town and the College, and also to the State of North Carolina. And for Mark Swaney, who lived only a short 26 years, may you rest in peace, knowing that there are those of us down here who will never forget what you have given to us.

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While I would like to think that over the past thousands of years all of mankind would have learned that the only real differences between black, white, Hispanic, and Asian people are simple biological ones, I can't say that I am that naive.

I think that in today's world, however, certain issues are made out to be things they're not. We like to shuffle problems like these into the "racial file cabinet," just as we have put other problems into other file cabinets, because we feel comfortable putting these labels on the problems. We feel that if they can be classified as anything other than

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This pull-out is the first in a series of in-depth reporting on events which shape and change our campus and the greater Davidson Community. It is the goal this publication to address the concerns of our loyal readers both here in Davidson and around the world. Suggestions from students, faculty, townspeople, and alumni are welcomed, as are criticisms or concerns. Please submit all correspondences to members of the editorial board at davidsonian@davidson.edu or through the address listed in text below.

The Davidsonian is published weekly on Tuesday during the academic year by the students of Davidson College. One copy per student. Please address all correspondences to: The Davidsonian, P.O. Box 219, Davidson, North Carolina 28036. Phone (704) 892-2148 or -2149. Our offices are located on the third floor of the Grey Student Union building. Opinions expressed in letters to the editors or commentaries do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editorial Board of The Davidsonian. Subscriptions cost \$40.00 per year. Advertising rates are available upon request.

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A call for compassion

Students, faculty, and townspeople urged to take action

I had a fantastic Christmas in my comfortable suburban residence just north of Atlanta. Two days after Christmas, however, my heart sank as I turned to Sec-

tion C, "The South," in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution to see Davidson, N.C. - my home - make headline news. My heart sank as I read that two members of our community had been tragically killed while I was enjoying the family Christmas celebration.

STUDENT OPINION
Joslyn Ogden

"NC civic leaders appeal for calm," stated the headline. As my eyes followed the rest of the story, I wished that the

shooting was not a reality for our fragile community. This kind of stuff always happens at a disturbingly safe distance from my community.

I doubt that race was a large factor in the actual killings, but race is a huge issue in the community's reaction to the tragedy. As police investigated on the "other side of the tracks," racial slurs were yelled at them. On Dec. 26, a meeting among town and religious leaders was held to discuss what had happened. Those from the East and

West could return to their residential havens and report what had truly occurred. Initially, I am sure that our "common ground" was rapidly retreating into the deep holes of misunderstandings, presumptions, and injustice.

How will we, as a community of scholars and servants, respond? Although the students were away when this occurred, we should respond compassionately to what happened. Unfortunately, it would be so easy for us to ignore this and continue in a Saran-Wrapped world of classes, parties, and gossip. But we can't afford to retreat.

This is our community. Are we willing to step out of our comfort zones and metaphorically "cross the tracks" here on campus? We should allow ourselves to be affected by this, instead of conveniently ignoring what happened in our neighborhood.

I wish I knew how to respond compassionately. I don't. I feel angry that a tragedy of this magnitude occurred in a community that (often eruditely) idealistically ascribes to justice and equality.

This is an opportunity to do more than attend Solidarity Week functions; take a step toward empathy, allow yourself to be affected, and respond with your heart and mind. Collectively, we can retrieve lost common ground.

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