

Why Trayvon Martin's Murder is Personal

And why we need to keep talking about it.

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The murder of Trayvon Martin has been so deeply personal for me and my entire family, in part because it is our story, too. I thought about not writing it, to protect what little privacy we have left, but honestly, when these tragedies happen to you and they're in the news, you don't really have privacy in the traditional sense anymore because it's already out there. And perhaps my story can help someone else understand how this affects the Black families these tragedies happen to.

My little brother, Clinton Robexar (pronounced “Ro-bear”) Allen was shot seven times, unarmed, by Clark Staller, a police officer within the Dallas Police Department on March 10, 2013. He was twenty-five. This was literally our worst nightmare come true. My brother is Black, tall—6'1'' and a former linebacker with tattoos. We feared those things not because my brother is or was a violent person, but because of how the wrong White person could perceive him, organize fear in his mind, and the tragedy that might follow. They would not know that my brother's tattoos were the names of family members and a pink ribbon to commemorate our mother winning her fight against breast cancer. They wouldn't know that Clinton was the baby of the family and so absolutely lovable that everyone, from family members to schoolmates called him “Big Baby.” Speaking of babies, Clinton has two twin boys who are only nineteen months old.

How did I feel watching six women, Southern, most of them White and full of White privilege letting George Zimmerman walk? I threw up. Not metaphorically. Very literally. I vomited whatever I had eaten two days prior. I sobbed until I was exhausted. I got the news sitting at Clinton's grave and just moaned, “It's so *unfair!* Why? Why do some White people hate us that much, value us so little?” Everyone in my family was just broken about the verdict. We didn't eat for two days. And the comments from juror B-57 just made me sick. “*George's heart was in the right place.*” I wanted to say, “What about Trayvon's heart—you know, the one, George blasted through?” George Zimmerman, a man whose ex-fiancée filed a restraining order against him, has been accused by a cousin of sexually molesting her for ten years, a man who called the police forty-six times in two years to report, amongst other things, children (Black presumably) playing in the

street, still, somehow warranted enough compassion from her that he was “George.” A *person*. Trayvon, a 17-year-old kid with dreams of being an engineer, college and his junior prom ahead of him, was just a “*boy of color*.”

It’s a similar thing with Clinton. His killer, Clark Staller, used his squad car to run over a suspect back in 2011 and lied about it—and still kept his job. Staller said then about the incident, “suspects lie all the time.” There’s a very good chance that Clark Staller was not allowed to return to active duty within the Marines due to a heart condition—but somehow, he was fit enough to patrol the streets of Dallas, along with a possible case of PTSD. Clark Staller shot my brother and at him so many times, two of his bullets hit a parked car. Yet, Clark Staller “feared for his life.” Within hours of Clinton’s death, before blood had even been drawn, news outlets were reporting that Clinton was high on PCP, which was later proven to be extremely untrue. Like Trayvon, my brother lay in a body bag overnight before detectives bothered to contact our parents. My brother’s blood remained on the sidewalk for two days before it was cleaned up. One of the apartment residents even took a photograph of a piece of his flesh in the grass.

This distortion of humanity is insulting, enraging and a constant reminder that Black skin is the justification that some people, often times White, use to perpetuate second-class citizenship. For me, being Black is a history, a source of pride, a challenge and a part of who I am. Within the context of America, it feels like a crime for which I am punished for, taxed for, excluded for and can never right.

We thought and prayed for Trayvon’s family that night. Every night, we light a white candle for Clinton near his pictures and we lit one for Trayvon too. We know exactly how they feel. It’s a horrible sameness to have with a fellow human being and citizen in America. To be told to your face, by the law that is supposed to be equal and blind, “*Your life and the lives of the people you love just isn’t worth as much.*” We know what it’s like to grieve for a man who had only begun to live. We know what it’s like to take care of those seemingly mundane things after they’re gone that just break your heart: folding their clothes. Canceling subscriptions. Faxing death certificates. Readjusting wills and life insurances. Black families have, for centuries, been adjusting to this new normal prematurely.

The most hurtful and draining thing for us—and maybe this is true for the Martins, but I can not say—is having to campaign for Clinton’s humanity while fighting for his justice and trying to make sense of this tragedy. Clinton was taken from us, shot seven times; once in the back, close range, while he was on the ground, struggling to die. Shot three times in the chest. Once in the abdomen. Once in the ass. Shot once under his arm while trying to raise his hands. He was trying to do what Clark Staller asked of him, as witnesses said. Dying and still

trying to obey the law. **Why are we having to defend his humanity?!** Yes, my brother was twenty-five and made some extremely youthful and stupid mistakes. Yes, he had misdemeanors—so what? Yes, my brother smoked weed—so fucking what? The press in Dallas has tried to use that as an attempt to say that he was a drug user, which he wasn't. Had my brother been White, he would have just been “troubled” or “finding his way.” Because he was Black, he was just another nigger who got what he deserved, in the court of racist Southern opinion.

It's a hurtful, dangerous double standard. A White kid who smokes weed is just a creative rebel, a social renegade. A Black kid who does is a criminal-in-training; a thug who'll start breaking into your homes to feed his “drug” habit. It's such bullshit.

Often Black parents tell their kids, “You have to be smarter and better just to get a chance.” So that's what they do. Many work their asses off to pay the private school tuition, to send their kids to college. They give them college dreams early to combat the other influences and society's low expectations of their potential. My mom sent us both to college—me to Williams and Clinton to Texas Southern. Trayvon's parents sent him to an aviation high school to encourage his dream of being an aviation engineer. Two weeks before we lost Clinton, he and our grandfather were looking at plots of land for him to start raising cattle and other livestock; on his father's side, Clinton would have been a fifth generation rancher. Clinton spoke to me about improving his French (a language that we both learned from our Creole grandmother) and coming to visit me in Los Angeles. He was excited about marrying his fiancée. All of those boys' dreams are gone, because they intimidated someone by being Black.

I share this story because Clinton's story, Trayvon's story are too familiar and too un-shocking to Black people. It happens and because it happens, every Black man gets that “talk” once he's old enough and tall enough to presumably strike anxiety in White hearts. If it's dark, always walk in the light. If you get stopped, keep your hands on the steering wheel. Don't make sudden movements. Don't argue. Don't resist arrest. *Do whatever you have to do to come back home in one piece, please son.*

And when these men don't come home in one piece, you're never whole again. My life has completely changed, forever. I had to take a leave of absence from grad school. I lost twenty-five pounds in two months. I had to say no to job offers and job interviews because mentally, I could not handle it. I could not even get out of bed for two weeks the first month. It is a pain that reaches beyond therapy and Lorazepam—so much so that I even made my psychiatrist cry. I'm not sure that I ever want kids; for fear that I could have a Black son and would have to face the very real fear of losing him. I am terrified of what could happen to my nephews

that I now have to help raise. I have to completely rebuild my life again without my oldest friend. This shit is *real*, people. I have seven bullet holes in my heart. When Clark Staller shot and killed Clinton, he shot all of us too. These men are a part of families who love them, adore them, just as you love your father, your brother, your son, nephew, uncle, cousin. They're human. They're invaluable. They *belong* to someone.

The anger, for me personally, is how complicit our criminal system and judicial process is in the cheapening and de-valuing of Black lives. According to an Open Records request that we recently pulled, over 150 unarmed men of color (mostly Black) have been killed by the Dallas Police Department in the past forty years. There have been over sixty since 2001. There has not been an indictment of one officer since 1973, when Darrell Cain shot and killed 12-year-old Santos Rodriguez in a game of Russian roulette. Tobias Mackey was shot nine times by a Dallas police officer. He was unarmed. His last words were, "Why did you shoot me? I didn't do anything." Matthew Tate answered him by walking up to him and putting a final bullet in his head. The District Attorney's office refused to indict. How can you trust the criminal and judicial systems that are supposed to protect you when they are more or less endorsing an open season on Black life? The George Zimmerman verdict is especially terrifying in that it feels like a scary precedent has been set. "I feared for my life," an already exhausted excuse in so many of these cases, is now a "get-out-of-a-jail" card for any and all cases of extreme vigilantism.

This is not to get into the particulars and details of my brother's case. If you are interested, you can learn more about Clinton on our blog, <http://clintonallen.tumblr.com>. If you are outraged that Clark Staller shot an unarmed man seven times and believe that he should be indicted, you can sign this petition: [Page on Change](#). If you are on Facebook, you can like the page, [Justice for Clinton Allen](#).

We have to have an honest conversation about race, our prejudices and what we're going to do to combat them in a real, constructive way. We have to make this country better and equal for all of us. I'm frankly tired of talking to other Black people about how horrible and tragic this is. I'm tired of people tip-toeing around race in both Trayvon and Clinton's deaths. We **all** have to talk about it because it is literally killing (the) **U.S.**