

Why do they run?

The Bethlehem Gadfly Jacob Blake, Police August 30, 2020

Latest in a series of posts responding to the Jacob Blake shooting

Let's call the writer of that **strong denial of systemic racism** individual-1.

Individual-1 poses a long and challenging series of arguments and statements in his denial of systemic racism. Let's keep the focus on what he says not who he is.

His email is virtually a go-to, one-stop resource for understanding a position completely contrary to the one Councilman Reynolds articulated for the Community Engagement Initiative.

His position must be faced. It must be understood. And, if necessary, it must be answered.

Gadfly has numbered Individual-1's key arguments and statements for easy focus, and he invites followers to focus, for and agin', in their replies. Always better to be specific, says the prof.

Because of the theme you've seen Gadfly following — that is, Black parents giving “The Talk,” the Black high school student with death at the traffic stop on her mind — these three points in Individual-1's essay jumped first to his attention.

17) “If only all subjects who interact with police would just follow directions and not resist. When a subject resists, law enforcement officer immediately go into a mind state to defend their life.”

19) “We need to teach our youngsters early on to respect the police. We need to strongly suggest a push to educate all children, just like we do with the DARE program, on what to do when interacting with the police, stressing cooperation and the following of orders. It needs to be stressed during a class that the police officer is in charge at the time of interaction and any issue one may have with the incident or process is not going to be sorted out in the middle of an arrest or police action. There is a

process for either a citizen's complaint or an internal affairs complaint in the following days. Parents need to continually stress this notion to their children."

34) "Remember, the important admonishment, and one that you all should be repeating to our youngsters, the police are in control of an incident and you should listen to and respect all commands during any encounter. An illegal stop, an illegal arrest, or alleged racism can be sorted out later and there should not be any escalation of the situation. The vast majority of people know this, comply with the police, and there are no issues with the encounter. Blacks however are four times more likely to resist arrest than whites and Hispanics combined."

Gadfly has a lot of things running around in his mind on this subject begging to be sorted out.

Maybe the question "Why do they run?" will help bring a focus. "They," meaning the Black males confronting the police.

George Floyd resisted being put in the police car. Claustrophobia, he said. Rayshard Brooks talked calmly to police for about 1/2 hour, but when it came time to put the cuffs on, he fought with immediate vigor — a complete transformation — and ran. Irrationally so. Why the quick, astonishing reversal in attitude? How could he expect that he would ever get away? We don't know the full story yet, but Jacob Blake was heading to a car. Was he thinking he could drive away? Where did he think he could go? Was he going after a knife? If so, what could he possibly, possibly hope to gain with it? What the hell was he thinking?

Are you with the Gadfly here? There's a kind of mystery in this "running" behavior, isn't there?

Why do they run?

Mr. White Gadfly was born lower middle-class. Shanty Irish. Lived in "Tin Town," near but not on the other side of the tracks. He was taught to respect the police. If Mr. White Gadfly then or now was detained or arrested by the police, he would act just as Individual-1 suggests. In Gadfly's mind, if he were arrested, rightly or wrongly, he imagines being treated respectfully, being able to secure a lawyer, and eventually sorting

things out reasonably if not painlessly in the long run. Mr. White Gadfly has been brought up in and has experienced a criminal justice system he can trust. He could not imagine running. Except *in* to a system designed to protect his rights. He would expect to trust the whole system even to the police self-policing themselves if he was involved with a bad apple. He has no reason to think otherwise.

Gadfly hopes no one is listening. As a teen, he was once brought home by a policeman who found him around midnight a bit stuporish leaning up against the wall of Novino's Luncheonette at the corner of Union Ave. and Baltimore Ave., Lansdowne, Pa., put him in the patrol car, walked him to his front door, and ushered him in with a pat on the butt and with advice to be quiet and hit the sack.

Gadfly hopes no one is listening. Gadfly has six sons. He's had "talks." He knows about nighttime anxiety, the night sweats. He remembers a "Hello, Dr. Gadfly" phone call and then retrieving one son from a local township police station where he and his wayward son were treated respectfully, though the "feeling-his-oats" son had certainly delivered some imprudent sass. The officer delivered the son from a dangerous situation. For which we can be forever thankful.

Gadfly trusts the police. He can look beyond a traffic stop gone bad and trust in a good outcome. Gadfly can trust the system.

Individual-1 says, "Blacks, however, are four times more likely to resist arrest than whites and Hispanics combined." And you might remember Chief Di Luzio saying quite clearly August 11 that it's the resistance that is the reason for the violence. A bit scarily, Individual-1 says that resistance puts "the officer immediately . . . into a mind state to defend their life."

Ok, it's a fact that Blacks are four times more likely to resist arrest than whites and Hispanics combined. And violence occurs thereupon and therefrom.

But the conversation shouldn't stop there.

That fact should naturally lead to this question: "*Why* are Blacks four times more likely to resist arrest than whites and Hispanics combined?"

Are we to think the answer is that Blacks are by nature ornery, uncontrollable, evil, animal . . . racist?

Please.

So what is the reason Blacks resist, run more than others? Running sometimes right into their deaths or life-long disability.

Perhaps because they have no trust in the system, a lack of trust based on hundreds of years of “tribal” experience.

Perhaps because they know from a kind of collective consciousness, a kind of in-bred instinct that if you go with the police, you may not come back. You might literally disappear.

The back of a police car a black hole.

Perhaps because they know from an oral tradition hundreds of years old that if you go with the police you may not come back. You might literally disappear. The New York Times video a few posts back began with a Black father remembering “My grandfather talked to me as a black man from Augusta, Georgia, growing up in the Deep South.”

From father to son in a long unbroken chain of “talks” reaching back to 1619.

Sound like Gadfly psycho-babble?

Maybe it is, and maybe others can explain it better or differently.

But Gadfly taught literature and film by and about Blacks for fifty years. He’s read their journals, their autobiographies. The white power structure is not to be trusted. You literally might disappear.

Gadfly has seen the data.

The data is there for all to see.

Prof Holona Ochs reminds us that the origin of our modern police forces is in the slave patrols of the South. There is such a thing as cultural memory. Blacks know their history.

There is, frankly, a not so subtle undercurrent in Individual-1's essay that the Blacks should be helping themselves (the reference to Affirmative Action, for instance), that the charge of systemic racism is an excuse for not succeeding, a crutch.

Certain people blame Blacks for their lowly condition. Justly celebrated Black hero Frederick Douglass (he didn't have a real name) suffered years of ignominy as a slave but finally courageously risked his life to escape to the "free" states in the north and better himself, only to find that he was subject to the Fugitive Slave Law and could be captured and returned to his "owner" in the South with the blessing of the national government.

Imagine.

That is systemic racism.

And there is plenty of it still in operation today.

Gadfly understands why they run.

Gadfly invites civil and courteous discussion of Individual-1's challenging statement from any perspective.

Good conversation builds community.