

WHAT
YOU
DO
NOT
KNOW



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“I ALWAYS PLAY THE ‘WHAT IF’ game,” Officer Jimmie Neal said. “What if right now someone comes in here and starts shooting at me; what am I going to do?”

426 people have been killed and 1243 people have been wounded in 2016 due to mass shootings (defined as four or more people being injured or killed due to gun violence according to CNN.com in 2016). The deadliest shooting in U.S. history occurred in June, killing 49 in the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Fla.

Mass shootings, officer shootings of minorities and the shooting of officers have all contributed to a national discussion of police integrity. This increasing amount of gun violence and violence against police officers has caused Student Resources Officer Jimmie Neal to consider his surroundings as he works. He believes change starts simply with education—teaching others how to respond in situations, especially when guns or police officers are involved.

“It’s my job to get in the classrooms and not only talk about the normal—drugs are bad, alcohol is bad—but also, this is how you need to respond when an officer asks you to do something, and this is why that officer is asking you to do that so you have a better understanding of it,” Neal said. “I think that is probably the number one thing that we [the police] need to start with is educating the public on what it is that we need to do.”

Neal considers the root of many tough situations involving the police to be the lack of education. Officers and citizens that find themselves in violent situations often have miscommunication. If the motives of both parties are understood more clearly, attacks and mass shootings may be reduced in the future.

The public can be quick to judge police actions with limited knowledge of situations after seeing video clips. Mainstream and social media share sections of videos, and the public does not often consider what happened before the video started and what drove the situation to its climax.

“I think that in today’s society we are very quick to pick up our phones or hit audio; everybody has the capability of pulling up their phones and capturing something that was serious,” Neal said. “Unfortunately, we see whatever was captured and we base our decision on how that situation happened. I think and I hope that people will step back and educate themselves on what happened in that particular situation.”

According to Neal, the media often aggravates the problem, sharing information before all of it is known. Despite this, he is not excusing the actions of officers or citizens.

“I think there are probably some ‘not good officers,’ but there are also ‘not good teachers,’ there are also ‘not good doctors.” Neal said. “Unfortunately, we have a very small percentage of officers that one could question ‘why you are doing what you’re doing?’ And so therefore every officer is looked at like that.”

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While there is a lot of speculation due to videos of race related shootings, Neal does not believe that these shootings reflect the majority of police officers’ views about race.

“I don’t believe that there are white police officers going around shooting black people,” Neal said. “I don’t believe that. I think that there is a situation, for whatever reasons whether it was right or wrong. There may be some instances as a police officer I may question why did that officer immediately go into that level of force. But I believe that people

have to step back and evaluate and educate themselves on what happened; why did that officer take the measures that he did?”

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On July 7, a citizen shot upon and killed five Dallas police officers, wounding nine others. Neal was working the night of the incident, like his best friend, Edward King, a detective for the Dallas Police Department. Neal was unaware if his friend was at the scene of the shooting and remained concerned for most of the night. With close connections to victims at the mass shooting, Neal began to reconsider some of his daily actions.

“I think this situation has probably affected me more when I’m not in my uniform,” Neal said. “When I was not in my uniform previous to the Dallas situation, I would wear my uniform home and when I was in normal clothes I would not wear my gun or have my gun on me. I think that the Dallas situation has changed that for me. I do not wear my uniform home at all [because] anybody else may just drive by and see that a police officer lives there and that is his personal car. I just won’t wear my uniform home and I’ll probably have my gun with me a lot more than I ever had before. Just because a lot of people know that I’m a police officer and it’s just one of those deals now that maybe I need to carry it on me a lot more than I did before.”

Neal has also found that he is hyper-aware and observant of his surroundings as a result of the shootings. He is constantly

evaluating what he would do if a shooting would occur. He strives to protect the public to the best of his ability, on and off the job.

Educating the public on the situation, Neal believes, may be able to prevent more conflicts from occurring in the future. Informing the public of their surroundings and discussing what someone should do if a shooting occurs or if a police officer pulls them over would ideally limit the damage or violence that may occur. Education is the key for everyone, no matter the location.

“It happens in Dallas, then what happens if you have people who may feel the same way here in Overland Park that this particular person in Dallas felt,” Neal said. “So who is not to say that while this Dallas situation is going on, that something in Overland Park is not going to happen. I was working that night when it happened. I think it’s just good to talk about what’s going on in the world. You know we, in Overland Park, are pretty lucky because we do not have some of the issues that other places have, but that doesn’t mean that it wouldn’t happen here.”

After the Dallas protests and subsequent shooting, there was word that protests might begin in Overland Park. While Overland Park did not have any protests that night, Neal believes that the area is not immune from future issues involving policing, despite the typical standard of safety.

Neal thinks that lack of education can be dangerous for both the public and the officers involved. When people are uneducated it

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can lead to a string of problems and misunderstandings that are sometimes impossible to reverse.

continued...

**OFFICER JIMMIE NEAL REVEALS HIS
UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE ON RECENT
VIOLENCE IN THIS FOUR-PAGE FEATURE**

“I always just go back to educating the public,” Neal said. “I think that is very important. The reason why I think that is very important is because if you don’t understand what I do, then you’re automatically a target. If you feel like you’re a target, then you feel like you have to defend yourself, if you feel like you have to defend yourself then the way which you speak and the way which you act is going to come off defensive. So if you’re coming off defensive, you don’t understand why I’m doing what I’m doing; why I’m asking you to do what I’m asking you to do. Then you’re going to be defensive, I’m going to take you defensiveness as you’re about to attack me and then we just have this cycle over and over again.”

While Neal understands that it is difficult for the public to understand policing, he also says that it is hard for police officers to know what people are going to do and the motives for their actions.

“I don’t know that you don’t have a weapon on you or that you don’t have any intent to harm me,” Neal said. “I don’t know that. If you understand that I didn’t know that then you are more apt to be like ‘I don’t have anything,’ then we can move forward.”

While Neal feels that it is important

for the public to understand the officer’s point of view, he also feels that the conversation about policing should be more of an open dialogue than a lecture. Lack of communication is the root of the problems, and ideally, communication is the solution.

“Just kind of having a dialogue about you know how you feel when an officer asks you this, [for the officer to] understand the public’s perspective on things,” Neal said. “I think it’s good for us to understand where they’re coming from as well, not just ‘Hey I want you guys to understand where I’m coming from.’ Having a good dialogue of this is where I’m coming from and this is why we’re asking you to do the things that we are asking you to do. Then hopefully we are able to come up to some solution on how we can go about our interactions.”

Neal believes that the key to police and citizens having better interactions is to ask questions when they arise.

“If you have a question about something that is going on, ask it. If you don’t ask, then you don’t know, if you don’t know then you don’t know how to respond, if you don’t know how to respond then a situation that didn’t have to be a situation turns into a bigger situation,” Neal said.

Officer Neal stands with fellow officer Mark Kelly in the front hallway near their offices. Photo by Ryan Barrett



Jesse Hoffman Contributor

AMERICAN VIOLENCE

A timeline of shootings in 2016

