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When teens aren't taught value of life, it can have deadly consequences

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Tennessee Voices



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Like most people who have followed the saga of the Jena 6, I am dismayed by the series of events preceding and following last Thursday's civil rights protest over the disparate treatment of six black teens originally charged with attempted murder for attacking a white teen.

These details can be found online with a simple Google search. My purpose in writing is to offer another perspective based on firsthand

experience.

Much sport has been made of the deadly sneaker that the district attorney introduced as a weapon. What is missed is the fact that sneakers and fists can become lethal weapons under the right circumstances.

Almost a year ago, my 41-year-old brother, Kevin Henderson, died from injuries he sustained on his job after he was attacked by a group of teenage boys.

According to a neighbor who witnessed the attack, five teens knocked my brother to the ground, kicking and stomping him until the neighbor intervened. Kevin staggered home, collapsed into a coma and was declared brain-dead within hours of the attack.

It took many months for a measure of justice to occur. So far, two of the five boys have been charged with first-degree manslaughter. Like Mychal Bell, one of the boys has been held many months without bail. He awaits sentencing, and the family hopes he will go straight to prison. Most, if not all, come from single-parent households.

Perhaps the boys meant to kill him. Perhaps it was an accident. In any event, a life was lost because a gang of boys mortally wounded a man who left home for his job, not knowing that he would never return.

I offer this story of a senseless killing to provide another perspective on what might have been going on in the head of the Jena district attorney.

Black crime is a serious problem that stereotypes all black youth. And it must be dealt with by a united black community that stands up and says enough is enough. Unfortunately, too many of our media-appointed leaders have failed to vigorously condemn the attack of the six against the one. This is unfortunate.

Who will teach our children to fight with pens and not fists? Who will teach them the value of life and the need for some to be peacemakers? It will certainly not be the community leaders who cut down the "white" tree, rather than share its shade. What was lost was a grand opportunity to teach

our young people some badly needed lessons about bigotry, intolerance, self-respect and dignity.

I write the above as an African-American mother who has raised two black males to adulthood. I write as an American who believes that we can do better. We must heal the past, and we must all take responsibility for our actions.

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