



## **Healing After Philando: Apology and Forgiveness are Critical**

On Friday, a St. Paul jury handed down its not-guilty verdict in the criminal manslaughter trial of St. Anthony police officer Jeronimo Yanez; the case stemmed from last July's traffic stop shooting of Philando Castile.

As many know, Philando's romantic partner, Diamond Reynolds (who was in the passenger seat and whose four-year-old daughter was in the vehicle's back seat), broadcast on Facebook live the moments after the shooting—and indeed, the world watched as Philando took his last breaths.

That video and the circumstances of the shooting (it occurred within seconds of Philando voluntarily advising Officer Yanez that he had a gun [Philando was licensed to carry the weapon]), again brought focus upon how law enforcement treats people of color and how humans in general are so afraid of others who are "different" from "us."

At the trial, Officer Yanez took the stand in his defense. Sarah Horner of the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, provided this account of Officer Yanez's testimony:

*"I was scared to death. I thought I was going to die," Yanez testified in Ramsey County District Court on Friday. 'My family was popping up in my head. My wife. My baby girl.'*

*Dressed in a dark gray suit, Yanez's voice sometimes shook as he recounted what prompted him to fatally shoot the 32-year-old black man less than a minute after pulling him over for a broken taillight in Falcon Heights on the evening of July 6.*

*At times, the 29-year-old Latino man wiped his eyes with a tissue as defense attorney Tom Kelly asked him questions.*

*He told the jury that Castile stared straight ahead and had "total disregard" for the officer's commands to stop reaching for the firearm that Castile had just seconds before disclosed he was carrying in the car. When he finally saw the top of Castile's pistol appear near his "right thigh area," Yanez said he had to act.*

*'I was able to see the firearm in Mr. Castile's hand, and that's when I engaged him,' Yanez told the jury. 'I had no other choice. ... I didn't want to shoot Mr. Castile. Those were not my intentions.'"*

Clearly, the entire incident was governed by fear—I don't doubt that Officer Yanez experienced fear as he stood outside Philando's vehicle. Similarly, I'm sure that Philando, too, was afraid as he sat in the driver's seat.

Fear is responsible for so very much of the violence we humans inflict upon each other. Our only way past such fear is to better know the people who make us afraid—the "other" of our society. As I've often said and written, the pathway to a better, more inclusive society is through familiarity and understanding our core commonalities as humans.

In the wake of the jury's verdict, we again face the question of how to heal our community. Once more, I call for a focused approach on community-wide inclusivity training for ALL Minnesotans—the entire six million of us. This concept is included within my previously-distributed "Ten Point Plan for Changing the Diversity and Inclusion Landscape."

As we wait for our leaders to really focus on the need for greater inclusivity, our community needs an apology. Thus, I call upon Officer Yanez to publicly apologize for Philando's death. The apology must be made in person and it must happen yet this week. He must take moral responsibility for making the mistake (Philando clearly had no intent to harm Officer Yanez) that resulted in Philando's unnecessary death.

On the other side of the equation, as difficult as it will be, the community must find it in its collective heart to forgive Officer Yanez. There is no assertion that Officer Yanez intentionally intended to harm Philando. Instead, he acted negligently. Yes, it was a horrific mistake, yet it is within the power of humans to forgive another human's mistake.

Forgiveness is critically necessary because as long as we harbor ill-will toward Officer Yanez, we will not be able to begin the hard work of healing ourselves and our community. Anger and resentment only harm those who harbor those emotions; they are corrosive to the heart and debilitating to the spirit. As difficult as it will be to forgive Officer Yanez, we must.

It will take much, much work to heal from the hurt that our community is now experiencing. I am here to engage in that work. Will you please join me?

*ellie*

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