

**Philadelphia Daily News**

**Editorial**

December 9, 1999

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## **We Are All Victims How Violence Divides Us, Binds Us**

Regardless of where you stand on gun control; or prison reform, or on the death penalty, we all have a common adversary.

Violence.

The events of the last few days have brought that reality home to this newspaper in the most tragic way.

But for many of you, violence is much more common and immediate than for those of us who have, until now, merely covered the news.

Perhaps you live with an abusive spouse or parent, and you flinch whenever you see a tightly clenched fist.

Or perhaps you live in a violent neighborhood, where the only light comes from the muzzle flash of exploding guns.

Or perhaps you live with violence within yourself, one that you struggle to contain, but that tears at your heart and soul and then, released, tears at those closest.

We live in a country that is safer than in the recent past, and much safer than others, but in many ways that is not saying very much.

Thirty years ago, during the height of the Vietnam conflict and the Cold War, President Johnson appointed a commission to study violence in America following the assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy.

After 18 months, the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, led by Milton Eisenhower, the brother of President Eisenhower, determined that "while serious external dangers remain, the graver threats today are internal."

The Commission went on to say that "the greatness and durability of most civilizations has been finally determined by how they have responded to these challenges from within. Ours will be no exception."

This week, the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation released an update to the Commission's original report in 1969. The news is not good.

We are a nation more violent and afraid than 30 years ago. For example, in a national poll in 1967, Americans were asked if there was an area within a mile of their home that they would be afraid to walk alone at night. Thirty years ago, 31 percent answered yes. In 1998, 41 percent answered yes.

And the Foundation found that many of the conditions that led to violence in the 60s remain today:

"To be a young, poor male, to be undereducated and without means of escape from an oppressive urban environment, to want what the society claims is available; to see around oneself illegitimate and often violent methods being used to achieve material gains; (these are) an enormous set of influences that pull many toward crime and delinquency," said the Commission 30 years ago.

Javier Goode, who has confessed to killing our friend and colleague Russell Byers, is a young man who despite having a job, apparently thought himself poor and without means of escape.

So he went out, with greed in his heart and a knife in his hand, and killed a good, sweet man.

Goode has brought great grief into the lives of Russell's family and friends and grief and shame into the lives of his own family. His selfish act also left this question:

How can we and our loved ones be safe?

We look for that answer, amid all the visceral emotions a murder can bring.

"I hope they fry the son-of-a-bitch," said Daily News editor Zack Stalberg, speaking from his heart for his lost friend and not he would be quick to say, for the newspaper.

In Harrisburg, state legislators invoked Russell's name to deny Philadelphia the opportunity to sue gun manufacturers.

If Russell "would have been carrying a defensive weapon, he might be alive to day," said Representative Robert Godshall, R-Montgomery.

From our own cauldron of grief, we say different. We don't want Russell's death to lead to another. We don't believe another person carrying a gun in Philadelphia is an answer to this city's awful violence.

We find hope in the fact that the Clinton administration an agency too big for Harrisburg to boss around is helping to prepare a class-action suit against irresponsible gunmakers and in the foundation's conclusion that this nation now has the knowledge and wealth to confront violence.

But despite our differences with those who believe in the death penalty and those who believe in owning handguns, we are all motivated by the same wish:

We want the clenched fist to open, the lights in neighborhoods to bring warmth instead of death, for violent souls to find rest, and for us all to find safety.