

the Liberator

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SPRING 2016
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THROWBACK TO TRIBUNE: "RACE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT"

January 27, 2017 · by The Liberator Magazine · in Current Staff,
Event Coverage, Jacob Hood, Political ·

Written by: **Jacob Hood**

Images by: *Texas Tribune*

CATEGORIES

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The panel for "Race and Law Enforcement" convened on September 24th at the AT&T Executive Education and Conference Center for the sixth annual Texas Tribune Festival.

The panel consisted of Art Acevedo, Chief of the Austin Police Department, Marc Levin, Director of the Center for Effective Justice and Right on Crime at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, Shakira Pumphrey, Policy Director for the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, Royce West, state senator and James White, state representative.

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~~ "The Language Issue" ~~

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Johnathan Silver, reporter for The Texas Tribune, moderated the Race and Law Enforcement panel featuring Art Acevedo, Marc Levin, Shakira Pumphrey, Royce West and James White at The Texas Tribune Festival on Sept. 24, 2016.

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The event began with Senator West noting that issues between racial minorities and law enforcement are not new, but that they are gaining more transparency. The panel acknowledged Terrence Crutcher, another unarmed black man killed by police, this time in Tulsa, Oklahoma in prompting discussion.

A focal point of the panel, and one of Senator West's main talking points, was reestablishing trust and transparency in police controversies. West cited a dash camera program he implemented in 2001 as an example of one way to combat this ongoing issue.

Moving into the heart of the matter on issues with police brutality, Representative White asserted that the path to building trust in the police must involve examining some of the laws that the police are made to enforce. White professed his belief that those laws contribute to the mistrust and negative attention law enforcement receives.

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White's comments echoed what Senator West initially stated at the panel: the need for transparency and reliability in instances where excessive or deadly force may be used.

Senator White continued on to read from a report published in 2015 by *The Washington Post* which cited 991 fatal police shootings in the past year. The report also revealed that black individuals were less likely than white individuals to be attacking police when fatal shootings occurred. Building off of this, Representative White called

- o Print Issues for a greater move toward deescalation techniques in police training, sentiment echoed by the rest of the panel.
- o The Language Issue
- o The Narrative Issue (Spring 2016)

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"Not everyone is cut out to be an officer," Marc Levin added, expressing his opinion that those who are easily threatened, scared, or have a "macho complex" should not enter the force.

Chief Acevedo, utilizing his expertise as "a community leader first, and a law enforcement official second," proved quickly to be a strong presence on the panel. He began with a powerful statement.

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“The police are not broken.”

Acevedo recognized that there is a problem concerning leadership and the toleration of mediocrity within law enforcement. He cited the case of David Joseph, an unarmed black teenager who was fatally shot in Austin after being said to have charged Officer Geoffrey Freeman. Chief Acevedo promptly fired Freeman, stating that his use of deadly force was not justified. This was just one of Acevedo's many efforts to begin the process of transforming structure within the police force.

Acevedo, in concordance with Levin, acknowledged that not everyone is cut out to be an officer. He proposed that every three to five years, departments "need to assess how much psychological trauma officers have [in order to] create healthier structures in policing."



Acevedo then addressed the issue of community relations with police and the lack of established trust. By placing more police in schools, said Acevedo, dropout rates tend to increase. Behaviors that are traditionally perceived as common among adolescents can now often result in criminal records.

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“Cops should be in schools to keep people safe,” said Acevedo.

He then recounted a personal anecdote of a fight that would have landed him in a greater deal of trouble today, eliciting laughter and mumbles of approval from the audience. The backbone of his approach to improving community relations can be summed up with the acronym of TREAT – **Transparency, Respect, Engage, Accountability and Trust.**

”

The panel closed with a simple question: “Do black lives matter?”

All on the panel responded with an emphatic “yes,” excluding Representative White.

“All lives matter, so therefore black lives matter,” White qualified, eliciting frustrated murmurs from the audience.



In her answer, Shakira Pumphrey posed a poignant question central to the issue race and law enforcement:

"Isn't it sad we still have to ask that question?"

A short period that allowed for only two questions followed the discussion, centering on increasing awareness and the sense of helplessness youth often face in these matters.

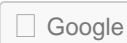
A young high school student asked what role she could play in this issue while not being able to vote, a question met with applause by the audience.

The panel answered with a succinct "get an education."



While the panel did not drill into the bedrock of minorities' relationship with law enforcement, as was expected by many in attendance, it did create potential for a healthy dialogue regarding the practices of police and ways in which law enforcement can begin to rebuild community relationships.

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