

OPINION

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Sniper Case Proves Fallacy of Stereotypes

(AP) — For several weeks, John Morgan kept looking for a white Chevy Astro minivan or a white box truck being driven by a white male who was responsible for a string of sniper-style killings in the Washington, D.C., suburbs.

So when police announced they had arrested two black men — John Allen Muhammad and John Lee Malvo — driving a dark blue Chevrolet Caprice, Morgan, who is black himself, was flabbergasted.

"With everything I had heard on television and what people were saying, everyone assumed they were going to be white men," Morgan, a telecommunications engineer said Sunday before services at Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church in this Washington suburb.

As the Washington area cel-

ebrated the end of the killings, some blacks questioned their own strongly held stereotypes about blacks and the types of crimes they may or may not commit.

Many criminologists, psychologists and sociologists who profile serial killers and other criminals had suggested for weeks that the sniper was likely a white male, probably in his 30s or 40s, who was a loner with a background in the military or weapons training.

Beverly Foster, a 49-year-old black dentist from Arlington, Va., believed them, saying she didn't think blacks "killed like that."

"It just seemed too senseless, too random. It just didn't fit us," she said as she left the Alfred Street Baptist Church in Alexandria, Va. "I'm not saying that we can't, but with all of the past

things that have happened, it just didn't seem like the type of thing we would do."

Black leaders said the arrests prove the fallacy of most stereotypes.

"None of us thought that the sniper was going to be one of us," Rev. John O. Peterson told his Alfred Street congregation. "But this just shows that the devil, he has an affirmative action program."

Stewart Small, a 35-year-old America Online writer-editor from Alexandria, said he, too, was surprised by the arrests.

"Traditionally, murders like this that have been taking place are — quote unquote — typical of the white male, like Theodore Kaczynski, the Unabomber, Ted Bundy, so I think a lot of us figured that the sniper would fall into that pattern," said Stewart. "When I found out, I was definitely shocked."

Morgan and Small both said they hoped that Muhammad's arrest won't create more racism for black American males.

"Historically, it seems like if you pardon the pun, one bad apple spoils it for everyone else, and historically, it seems especially true for the black male," Small said.

Encouraging Voters

Students from the Portland area will be out in force this weekend encouraging people to return their ballots in this Tuesday's vote-by-mail General Election.

The kids are taking part in the Vote for Children project, a non-partisan voter turnout effort. The

group is working with 23 Portland public schools to raise voter turnout by five percent.

Get out the vote walks are planned Saturday departing from Portsmouth and Ockley Green Middle Schools in north Portland and Binnsmead Middle school in southeast Portland.

County elections officials must receive the ballots by 8 p.m. on Election Day, Tuesday, Nov. 5. Postmarks do not count. Official ballot drop sites are located at all Multnomah County libraries and at some Fred Meyer stores, including Interstate and Peninsula.

Democracy lesson: Why your vote counts

Editor's note: The 4th grade class at King Elementary School in northeast Portland is getting a lesson in democracy with help from Vote for Children, a non-partisan voter turnout effort. The Portland Observer is pleased to share their thoughts on voting in their own words:

By SHAMINIQUE CLOMAN
"Voting is important so people do not make bad laws, like girls not being able to

play sports. In the past, black people couldn't vote and white and black people couldn't eat or live together. It is important to vote in Oregon so we can have better schools and more money."

By BRITTANY GOLDSBY
"It is important to vote because the wrong person might win."

By MATORINNE THOMAS
"Voting is important because in 1989 a Lansing, Mich. school district proposition failed when

the final count produced a tie vote of 5,147 for and 5,147 against. The result meant the school district lost in trying to get more money to operate schools and the district had to reduce its budget by \$2.5 million."

By FORDOS JAHR
"It is important to vote because schools could lose money for materials like paper and scissors. There could be shorter school days and fewer teachers - which is not a good thing."

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Agents of Barbarism

Recent tragedies symbolize capacity for evil

BY HUGH B. PRICE

At first glance it seems despicably profane to associate the evil murderous rampage of the metropolitan Washington, D.C. sniper attacks and the monstrous terror bombing in Bali, Indonesia with the courageous literate humanity

Imre Kertesz, this year's Nobel Laureate in Literature, has practiced all his life.

And I do not.

Rather, I mention them to contrast these killers' profound brutality with the outstanding quality Kertesz' novels and essays are said to make so compellingly clear.

That is, as the Nobel Prize jury's proclamation stated, Kertesz' work "upholds the fragile experience of the individual against the barbaric arbitrariness of history."

As we contemplate with horror the catastrophe in Bali and, here in America, the sniper deaths, let us understand that this is the connection: the wrenching juxtaposition of good and evil—the innocent victims and the cowardly calculating killers whose inhumanity has transformed them into evil spirits in human form.

Both these tragedies symbolize so much of human history—on the one hand, the great capacity of some human beings to commit evil, and, on the other, the great capacity of some human beings to live lives of great, simple dignity.

Kertesz, a Hungarian-born Jew, witnessed and survived two of the most destructive examples of the barbaric arbitrariness of history. As a teenager, he was imprisoned in the Nazi death camps of Auschwitz and Buchenwald. Afterward, he lived in Hungary during the entire time of its domination by the Soviet Union.

But, although he lived in an environment where government demanded a rigid, stifling conformity, Kertesz expressed in his novels and essays a relentless resistance to unjust social and political conformity.



Hugh B. Price

Surely, it is no accident of history that he and his ideas, largely unknown in the West until now, come to our attention at this most dangerous moment.

Many in the world were lulled by the estimable progress civilization has made in many fields since

World War II into thinking that humankind had largely rid itself of its chilling capacity for the greatest cruelty the Nazis had taken to the depths of depravity. However, we know now that the carnage of the 1990s in the Balkans and Guatemala and Rwanda and Oklahoma City and so many others places around the world demonstrates yet again how thin the veneer of civilization remains.

The barbaric arbitrariness of history took the lives of hundreds of thousands in the last decade, as a half-century earlier it had taken the lives of millions.

What, one asks now, reeling with grief, have those who have perished at the hands of the killers in Bali and in metropolitan Washington done to deserve this cruel fate?

This is the same question my colleagues at the Wall Street headquarters of the National Urban League asked 13 months ago, as the World Trade Center complex fell to earth less than a mile from our doorstep and the Pentagon exploded in fatal flames. Then, thousands of lives were taken in moments by a cabal of men of bottomless evil. And it is the question that loomed large in my mind little more than a week ago when I kept a speaking engagement in the Washington suburb of Bowie, Maryland—where the sniper had shot and wounded a 13-year-old boy.

This is the same question that was asked about those who perished in the death camps sixty years ago. It is the same question that is asked about the victims whenever and wherever the human capacity for large-scale evil can have its way: What did they do to deserve this cruel fate? Why them?

Hugh B. Price is president of the National Urban League

Just think: Your son is bright, healthy and headed for college one day. You love the direction your career has taken. You're doing a lot of the things you planned and even a few you didn't. Living life to the fullest is easy when you have family behind you. American Family Mutual Insurance. Call and talk to one of our helpful, friendly agents. You'll find out why we're consistently rated A+ (Superior) by A.M. Best, the insurance rating authority. Then, go on. Dream. Plan. What you do next is up to you and we'll be here to help you.

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