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OPINION

Why the South Carolina Cop May Walk

Video doesn't guarantee a conviction

BY EARL OFARI HUTCHINSON

Former North Charleston Police officer Michael Thomas Slager has been charged with murder in the shooting death of Walter Scott. At first glance, it seems a virtual slam dunk to nail Slager on the charge.

There's the clear as a bell video shot in broad daylight which shows Scott in full flight not toward but away from Slager. There's Slager clearly drilling him as he flees. There's the unequivocal, even outraged retort by North Charleston Police Chief Eddie Driggers that he was "sickened" at seeing the video. North Charleston Mayor Keith Summey and Driggers visited the slain man's family and com-



miserated with their "suffering."

But that doesn't mean that he'll be convicted of murder, or for that matter any other charge in the Scott killing. The reason for that tells much about the way the over use of deadly force by officers is treated within the criminal justice system. Even in the rare cases, such as Slager where cops are hauled into a court docket for overuse of deadly force, they routinely walk free. Their defense lawyers are top guns, with lots of experience defending police officers accused of misconduct.

Police unions bankroll their defense and spare no expense. Slager is the even more rare exception in that he was actually fired and jailed. They are usually placed on administrative (paid) leave pending the start or finish of a pro forma promised investigation. And when they do serve pre-trial jail time, they are quickly released on ridiculously low bail. We'll watch closely to see what Slager's bail is set at.

When the cops are tried by a jury, police defense attorneys

seek to get as many middle class people, whites and even blacks and Latinos, on the jury as possible. The presumption is that they are much more likely to believe the testimony of police and police defense witnesses than black witnesses, defendants, or even the victims. It's a presumption that has been born out in police misconduct trials time and again. George Zimmerman even got the benefit of that presumption when he walked in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin.

It's an uphill battle for prosecutors to overcome both pro-police attitudes and negative racial stereotypes. Stanford University researchers recently found that even when many whites are presented with evidence that the criminal justice system is loaded with racial bias toward blacks they are more likely to support tough, draconian laws such as three strikes, tough sentencing and increased incarceration. Scott is a near textbook example of that problem.

Before the video surfaced, the press had a field day, hap-

pily playing up Scott's criminal record. The implication always being that he was a bad guy who got what he deserved and that the officer was the put upon victim that had no choice but to use deadly force.

The negative perceptions of blacks, especially black males, by much of the public are not the only problem in effecting effective legal measures against police violence. There is no iron-clad standard of what is or isn't an acceptable use of force in police misconduct cases. It often comes down to a judgment call by the officer.

In the Rodney King beating case in 1992 in which four LAPD officers stood trial, defense attorneys painted King as the aggressor and claimed that the level of force used against him was justified. This pattern has been evident in a number of celebrated cases since then. Police claim that they feared for their lives in confronting civilians and they use deadly force solely in self-defense.

Then there's the supposed-

ly smoking gun video that will prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Slager overused deadly force. The King case proved this to be bunkum. The attorneys twisted, turned, dissected, re-dissected, analyzed and reanalyzed it from every earthly angle. They claimed it didn't show what led up to the King beating, didn't show King's resistance, didn't show the officers giving instructions to him to comply, and was too limited in the angle that it was shot. The jury bought the claim.

This tact has been used repeatedly in other instances where videos and cell phone footage catches a cop committing an abuse against an unarmed non resisting citizen. It's still a matter of what you see is really not what you see in these cases.

Slager may indeed wind up being the even rarer still case of a cop convicted of murdering in cold-blood an unarmed black man. If past history is any guide, though, just don't bet on it yet.

Earl Ofari Hutchinson is an author and political analyst.

Power of Education to Renew, Begin and Grow

PCC Cascade Job fair sets example

BY DR. KAREN EDWARDS

Springtime has arrived, a season that underscores messages of renewal, beginnings and growth. Such concepts can be applied personally or professionally and at Portland Community College's Cascade Campus they have meaning for our students in both realms. Our faculty and staff strive to positively impact the lives of our students – to affect them on a personal level and nurture their confidence – at the same time they're educating students to best prepare them for future professional opportunities.

An example of this will be seen at the PCC Cascade Job Fair slated for Tuesday, April 28. Now in its 18th year, the event is open to the general public in



addition to our students.

The job fair brings together local employers – more than 70 – in need of qualified, educated personnel, with approximately 1,000 talented and skilled individuals proactively scouting for employment.

In the case of our students, they're able to demonstrate, with confidence, how their personal and intellectual growth through

contributes to the economic, cultural and social development of its immediate locale and region. It also showcases two integral parts of the college's three-pronged mission: to strengthen academic skills and to prepare students for direct entry to the workforce.

Both aspects can be seen in other ways at the Cascade Campus. In only two years here, a

The job fair illustrates the ability of PCC to serve as a community resource

education successfully translates into professional aptitude that benefits a business. Hires stemming from the job fair create a win-win scenario for both the employer and the employee, and from a larger perspective, these kinds of results bolster Portland's economy.

The job fair illustrates the ability of PCC to serve as a community resource, one that

student can fully prepare for a career in the skilled trades, or as a medical laboratory technician, or a paramedic – all of them in-demand jobs that offer good wages and benefits.

And in many fields of study, a student can earn professional certification in one year or less. An example of this trajectory is the three-month Career Pathways certificate program

in heating, ventilation and air conditioning installation, a program associated with the Cascade Campus at the college's newly established Swan Island Trades Center. So far, 20 HVAC students have graduated this year with state certification, and some of these students plan to continue their studies; for one recent graduate, the HVAC certification moves her further along in PCC's two-year facilities maintenance technology program, and she hopes to eventually earn a journeyman electrical license.

The third part of PCC's mission caters to students looking to pursue a four-year degree. By enrolling in the college's Associate in Arts Oregon Transfer degree program – which can be done at Cascade Campus, right here in your own backyard – students are guaranteed to have met all lower division general education requirements. This enables them entrance to a public university in Oregon as a junior . . . and saves them thousands of dollars in tuition.

Portland Community College

is a smart choice, and as we enter the "season of college decision-making" – April, May and June – I would strongly encourage would-be college students to consider PCC as a top choice. Over the next couple of months, you'll see billboards and outdoor advertising throughout the city, advocating for students to "Think PCC First." I support this ambition wholeheartedly; high quality education combined with access and affordability simply makes sense.

Education has always been one of the foremost means for people to effect positive change in their lives. Education is fuel to a thriving workforce and economy, as well as power to the individuals who partake in it. This is especially true at community colleges, at PCC and at the Cascade Campus. Stop by for a visit – I welcome having you as our guest, so you can see for yourselves the transformative power education offers.

Dr. Karin Edwards is president of Portland Community College's Cascade Campus in north Portland.