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# OPINION

## Arming Police at PSU and the Coming Conflict

### Don't bring a gun to an unarmed fight

BY TOM H. HASTINGS  
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

On the campus where I teach, Portland State University, there has never been a mass shooting. Indeed, as long as I've been here—almost the entire millennium!—no one here has been shot.

Our campus security officers have been unarmed the entire time and managed to de-escalate or somehow finesse every situation that has arisen. Good job!

Meanwhile, the “normal” police across the U.S. have been shooting and choking unarmed people to death. Black America is in a state of general disaffection with the high rate of unarmed black people who get killed—some say murdered—by beweaponed police officers every month, including several in the last few years in our town, Portland.

Then, in the fall of 2014, as



the country continued to roil over these deaths—and new ones like the shooting of young unarmed Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo. and then the chokehold suffocation of unarmed father of six, Eric Garner, in New York—the PSU Board of Trustees voted to create an armed police force on our campus. Can you see the conflict coming?

My campus is not diverse—60 percent white and a mere three percent African American, for example—but the students and faculty certainly aspire toward more of a complex and representative mix of humankind. Some eight percent of students are international, many from the Middle East, and another 15 percent are either Asian or Latina/o.

The new president of the student body is a young Syrian-born mother, a Muslim who is also a masters candidate in Conflict Resolution, specializing in nonviolent international conflict transformation. Dana Ghazi is a minority student but she was chosen by the majority to lead. I asked her if she had ideas about the campus secu-

city situation.

“As a student leader my first priority is to bring back the focus on students’ voices in opposition to arming the police,” she said.

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“This is the number one issue on my platform and I intend to work with all stakeholders on campus to ensure that our campus is a safe and inclusive space for all students.”

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Ghazi asserts it's not that of the students, and while she is thrust

straight into the center of this controversy by her fellow students, she feels amongst the marginalized by the administration.

“As an Arab, a Muslim and/or a woman of color I do not personally feel safer,” she said. “The truth of the matter is that our communities struggle with racism, islamophobia and sexism, issues rooted in structural violence. It is enough to pay attention to the national

news in the United States to grasp the gravity of these issues. Additionally, the university is an educational space, a space for learning. I feel uneasy when I walk to class in the morning ready to be intellectually stimulated only to pass by people in uniform with guns on their waists.”

Ghazi said she's traumatized watching people here and abroad being subjects to military and police violence.

“By this point the campus does not feel like a welcoming space to me,” she said. “I respect and support measures to ensure security on campus, however, I do believe there are alternative solutions that haven't yet been considered.”

Presumably, since the PSU administration has made its decision, the question is settled. But what social scientists know is that to presume that is not to actually know that. Questions that people care about tend to persist and can be revisited. The PSU community has in some ways just begun this conversation.

*Tom H. Hastings is assistant professor in Conflict Resolution at Portland State University.*

## He Sang His Way Out of the Cotton Fields to Touch Us

### Celebrating B.B. King's iconic career

BY MARC H. MORIAL

As a young boy in 1920s Mississippi, Riley B. King—who would one day come to be known as legendary blues icon B.B. King—was introduced to the electric guitar at Rev. Archie Fair's church. The introduction soon turned into infatuation, with King deciding he would learn to play a guitar. As soon as King got old enough, he ordered a guitar playbook from a Sears and Roebuck mail catalog. The first tune he learned to play was “You Are My Sunshine.” Fortunately for us, it would not be the last tune he would coax from his yielding guitar strings.

King was born in 1925 on a cotton plantation in the Mississippi Delta. The future King of the Blues—the son of sharecroppers and the great-grandson of a slave—worked the fields, first as a picker at the age of seven and then a mule driver. He aspired to be a gospel singer like his mentor, Rev. Archie, but fate had other plans.



In a 1993 interview, King admitted to leaving Mississippi in the early 1940s because of the racial violence, lynchings and hangings that were becoming all too commonplace. King moved to Memphis, Tenn., playing small gigs and working as a disc jockey at WDIA, the local blues station.

The station manager dubbed King the “Beale Street Blues Boy,” which was shortened to “Blues Boy,” and then to B.B.—and it stuck. It was at this time that King made another momentous introduction, this time to T-Bone Walker singing “Stormy Monday.” King said it was the first time he had ever heard blues on an electric guitar and he was determined to get one. He got that electric guitar in 1946.

What followed was an enduring, influential career that defined and redefined the blues, a quintessentially American art form with roots in African-American slave songs, field hollers and spirituals. King carried its moans and mourning to the four corners of the earth.

The blues, set loose on the guitar strings and growl of one of America's greatest musicians, spoke of our universal experience

of pain and perseverance, tribulations and triumphs. King once remarked that, “Blues music actually did start because of pain.” A pain he experienced at an early age, and like so many influential and groundbreaking figures that had come before him, King used his talent to rise out of the dirt of his humble beginnings to live a life as industrious as it was incred-

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ible.

A 15-time Grammy Award winner—the most Grammys ever received by a blues singer—King was also awarded the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1987. In 1998, his most acclaimed song “The Thrill Is Gone” was awarded the Grammy Hall of Fame Award. King also received a National Medal of the Arts award,

a Presidential Medal of Freedom and has been inducted in both the Rock and Roll and Blues Halls of Fame.

King seemed to always be performing somewhere, playing an average of over 200 concert dates a year well into his seventies. In 1956, King and his band played an astonishing 342 concerts. He never stopped doing what he loved

most: playing the music, which he said “was bleeding the same blood as me.”

King passed away peacefully in his sleep at his Las Vegas home, and yet, the thrill is far from gone. His notes and innovative sound gave birth to countless blues and rock players, including Eric Clapton, Carlos Santana and Keith Richards, to name a few.

His contribution to the blues can be heard, and will continue to be heard, in jazz and rock. King's outsized influence on blues—on American music—cannot be overstated. B.B. King is to blues what Louis Armstrong is to jazz, Elvis is to rock, James Brown is to funk and Michael Jackson is to pop. Like King, you cannot mention these musical genres without prominently mentioning their names and substantial contributions.

Today I join the chorus of those celebrating King and his iconic career. He sang his way out of Mississippi's cotton fields to touch each of us—black or white, American or not—with his talent and insight into our shared human experience. And it is, perhaps, from his brand of soul music that we can learn what found him in that recording studio or night-club almost every day of his life: “Everybody wants to know why I sing the blues. Yes, I say everybody wanna know why I sing the blues. Well, I've been around a long time. I really have paid my dues.”

I couldn't agree more. Rest in peace, B.B.

*Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.*