

OP-ED

The real bias that divides us

By Caryl Rivers

DOES "CONFIRMATION bias" influence the way whites think about police shootings of young men of color?

This bias is the tendency to interpret or remember information in a way that confirms what we already believe, and helps us to ignore new data. And it may explain the tension between white cops and black kids — and the public reaction to them — more than outright racism does.

Many of us think police must be in the right because we have internalized a fear of black males and assume that they are up to no good.

As Harvard sociologist Charles Ogletree has pointed out, "Ninety-nine percent of black people don't commit crimes, yet we see the images of back people day in, day out, and the impression is that they're all committing crimes."

Young black males in recent years were at 21 times greater risk of being shot dead by police than their white counterparts, reports ProPublica, which analyzed federal data this year. It found that in "1,217 deadly police shootings from 2010 to 2012, blacks, age 15 to 19, were killed at a rate of 31.17 per million," compared with 1.47 per million white

We interpret new information to support our existing beliefs.

males in that age range.

Roger J.R. Levesque of Indiana State University says that eyewitnesses to crimes generally report scenarios that are consistent with confirmation bias. Among the studies he cites is one in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* that found merely seeing a black face led subjects to be more likely to mistake objects for weapons.

In Ferguson, Mo., the white officer who fatally shot Michael Brown, an unarmed black 18-year-old, described Brown as demon-like. Would he have used such a word if the teenager had been white?

Confirmation bias undoubtedly helped the defense in the 2013 trial in the death of Trayvon Martin. Lawyers successfully "thuggized" the black teenager, who was walking home carrying candy and a bottle of tea when he was shot by a white neighborhood watch member. Martin had no criminal record, but the defense dug up some minor prob-

lems he had in school and made an animated video showing him attacking the white man who shot him. There was no actual evidence that the unarmed teenager started the fight. But jurors clearly bought that narrative.

Throughout U.S. history, confirmation bias has helped some white people use the image of the evil black man for their own ends. The "Willie Horton" TV ad caused a huge controversy when it ran during the 1988 presidential race between George H.W. Bush and Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis. The ad featured a fearsome-looking mug shot of a black convict who raped a woman while free under a Massachusetts prison furlough program backed by Dukakis. The ad was intended to picture Dukakis as soft on crime, and it worked.

Whites trying to escape punishment for their crimes sometimes find black men convenient scapegoats, because they are so readily seen as prone to crime. In 1989, a Boston white man, Charles Stuart, was shot in a black neighborhood in the city, along with his pregnant wife. He blamed a "black male." His wife and son, who was delivered prematurely, later died.

News coverage was extremely sympathetic until evidence surfaced indicating that Stuart shot

his wife and himself.

In 1994, Susan Smith, a South Carolina woman, claimed that a black man had hijacked her car and kidnapped her two young sons. For days, the news media gave around-the-clock coverage to a nationwide search for the black carjacker. But no such man existed. Smith had drowned her two sons by pushing her car into a lake with the boys inside. She had a wealthy boyfriend who allegedly was not interested in having a "ready-made" family.

It's no wonder whites so easily accept the image of the evil black male. But this was not always so.

Early in the history of slavery in the Western Hemisphere, notes Audrey Smedley, now professor emerita of anthropology at Virginia Commonwealth University, blacks were not set apart from other laborers. The first slaves the English used in the Caribbean were Irish. And there were more Irish slaves in the middle of the 17th century than any others.

At that time, Smedley writes, African slaves and European slaves "worked together, they played together ... they lived together" and color didn't "make much difference ... because they were all in the same boat."

One 17th century planter who wrote to the trustees of his com-

pany said, "Please don't send us any more Irishmen. Send us some Africans, because the Africans are civilized and the Irish are not."

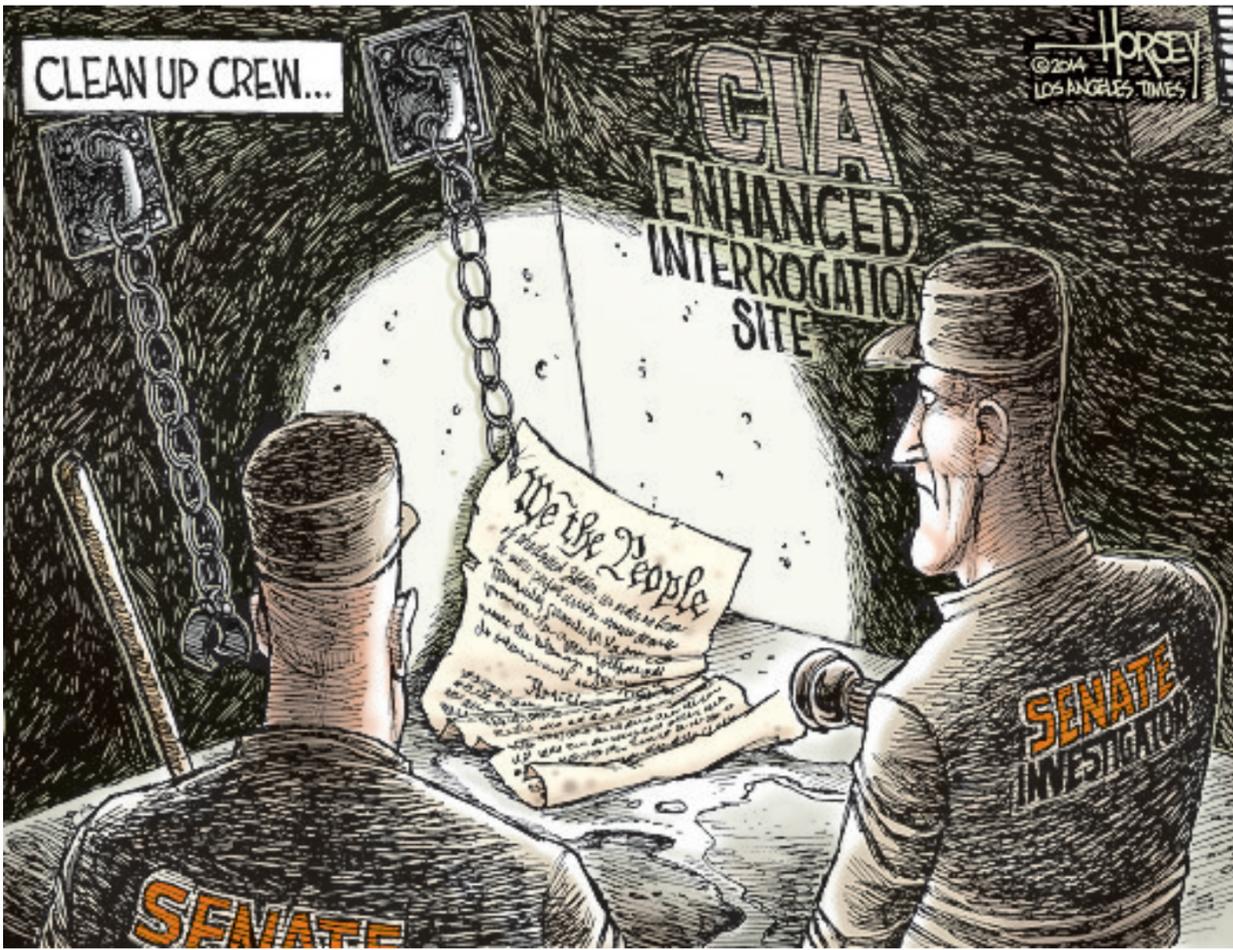
But plantations grew ever larger and the African slave trade exploded. To justify the cruelty of lifetime slavery, the myth had to be manufactured that blacks — especially men — were subhuman and violent. That image stuck.

In the years since, those ideas too often have intensified. As Georgetown University professor Michael Eric Dyson points out, "More than 45 years ago, the Kerner Commission concluded that we lived in two societies, one white, one black, separate and still unequal." And we still do. If we don't resolve this gap, Dyson writes, "We are doomed to watch the same sparks reignite, whenever and wherever injustice meets desperation."

Only when we realize the power of confirmation bias, and start looking at reality instead of stereotypes and misinformation, will things change.

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How to move Ferguson forward

RONALD BROWNSTEIN

OF ALL THE ISSUES raised by the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, perhaps the most intractable is the challenge of restoring opportunity to the high-poverty, high-crime, racially segregated neighborhoods where police and minority communities often collide most sharply.

Whatever else is done to rebuild trust or rethink policing practices, America will continue to face too many wrenching cases like these unless it can first temper crime in such places by providing more of the people who live in them with plausible chances to advance economically. The catch is that policymakers have long struggled to find sustainable, and replicable, ways to revive neighborhoods isolated by concentrated poverty.

In some ways, the search for "place-based" strategies to renew troubled communities traces back to Jane Addams and the late 19th century settlement houses that worked to integrate European immigrants into American society during the melting pot era, as urban planner Elwood Hopkins notes in an insightful collection of papers on neighborhood revitalization published last week by USC's Sol Price School of Public Policy.

The next big wave of neighborhood-based development efforts came during President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, which dispatched a flotilla of new federal programs into struggling neighborhoods. In the decades since, institutions from the federal government to

local nonprofits have pursued an ever-evolving array of ideas. These have ranged from funneling private investment for housing and commercial development through community development corporations to offering federal tax breaks designed to attract business investment in places long denied them.

Many of these efforts have tangibly improved the places they've targeted. The community development corporations, in particular, have shown remarkable skill and tenacity in building acres of affordable homes that provide working families with the dignity of clean and safe places to raise their children. But, overall, as Hopkins writes, "over the last 50 years, the field has been humbled by ... the limited effectiveness of the place-based initiatives undertaken to date."

Today, the persistence of concentrated poverty remains a huge barrier to developing the potential of the black and Latino young people who will constitute a growing share of the future workforce. Studies indicate that about three-quarters of the former group and two-thirds of the latter attend public schools where a majority of their classmates qualify as low-income. (That's true for only about 3 in 10 whites.)

The United States has usually looked hardest at the problems of the isolated poor after tension between police and minority communities has erupted into violent unrest — as in Watts in 1965, or again in Los Angeles in 1992 after the verdict in the Rodney King beating case. A conference at USC last week, which accompanied the release of the

neighborhood-revitalization papers, suggested that if the nation is ready once more to examine these enduring challenges, there may be some valuable new approaches to explore.

Two core ideas now animate the best thinking about reinvigorating troubled neighborhoods. One is improving coordination among the array of government programs — housing, education, job training, public safety — already serving low-income

Poverty remains a huge barrier to developing minority youths' potential.

neighborhoods. Influenced by the example of the Harlem Children's Zone, which provides a comprehensive suite of services for at-risk children in that New York neighborhood, President Obama has systematically pushed federal agencies to better align their efforts.

That has generated a series of administration projects, such as Choice Neighborhoods (in housing) and Promise Neighborhoods (in education), that have compelled not only federal departments, but also local public and private anti-poverty programs, to cooperate more closely. The capstone of these efforts is Obama's Promise Zones initiative, which seeks to direct resources from 50 federal programs into a few poverty-stricken neighborhoods; the administration picked five, and it plans to select 15 more

by 2016. Some states may also soon adopt the idea.

The resources behind public programs, though, won't ever match the level of need, which helps explain the second chord of thinking: finding new ways to connect troubled neighborhoods with market forces. For example, leaders in cities such as Cleveland are nudging inner-city universities and hospitals to buy more from neighboring small businesses.

More broadly, the appeal of urban life for many college-educated young people can help cities incubate mixed-income neighborhoods that draw investment and jobs — as long as policy ensures that those new arrivals don't simply displace low-income people who are already living there, says Richard Parks, executive director of the Sol Price Center for Social Innovation.

Other conference speakers were more leery of relying on the private sector to lift troubled neighborhoods, especially after the subprime-mortgage crisis battered low-income and minority families. But as Hopkins observes, "the most cutting-edge creativity" is occurring within initiatives that combine public, philanthropic and private-sector investments to seed change. At a moment when the nation is so ominously pulling apart, such inclusive initiatives would offer the added benefit of reminding us that America works best when it transcends its divides.

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A Pacific approach to climate

By Edmund G. Brown Jr., Christy Clark, Jay Inslee and John Kitzhaber

THE UNITED NATIONS Climate Change Conference in Lima, Peru, is wrapping up Friday after 12 days of negotiations on global carbon emissions.

Yet, even as we work through the complexities of an international agreement, it would be a mistake to miss the extensive change that's already taking place here on North America's Pacific Coast. Last year, our four governments — the states of California, Oregon and Washington and the Province of British Columbia — reached a landmark agreement to align climate and energy strategies for 54 million Americans and Canadians.

The Pacific Coast represents the world's fifth-largest economy, with a GDP of \$2.8 trillion. By working together we are transforming our economies and influencing world markets for the better. Our regional model shows that it is possible to take serious action on climate change and simultaneously expand an economy with well-paying jobs. And we believe it can be a blueprint for other regions to take action.

Our agreement, which established the Pacific Coast Action Plan on Climate and Energy, represents a regionwide commitment to air quality, clean fuels, carbon pricing, and clean-energy jobs. But it also respects that we have different approaches to reaching our shared goals. California's carbon pricing program uses an economywide cap-and-trade system, while British Columbia has a revenue-neutral carbon tax program. Oregon is building on existing programs to set a price on carbon emissions. Washington is developing a carbon market program, including consultations with stakeholders.

We are aligning our reduction targets for greenhouse gas emissions and charting collective progress. We also want clean-energy businesses in our region to grow. All of our jurisdictions are working together to advance zero-emission vehicles, promote energy-efficient buildings and develop climate-resilient infrastructure.

It's our goal not just to make an impact on the Pacific Coast but also to create a prosperous pathway and successful model. We called for action at the U.N. Climate Summit in New York in September. This week we took our message and model to Lima. Next year we will join in the effort to reach a final, comprehensive climate agreement in Paris.

We're proud of what we've accomplished. Yet, if we're alone in what we're doing, our efforts won't be enough. We are mindful of the proverb "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." In the battle to save a warming planet, we do not have the luxury of going slowly or alone.

EDMUND G. BROWN JR. is the governor of California, JOHN KITZHABER is the governor of Oregon, JAY INSLIE is the governor of Washington and CHRISTY CLARK is the premier of British Columbia. The four leaders are members of the Pacific Coast Collaborative.