

Ghetto Justice

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Breaking news, it's always breaking news now a day's. But this time, there was a twist. An elderly white man had fatally shot a young black male. The white guy had accused the black kid of breaking into his house and stealing guns from him and had caught the burglary on surveillance video. The black kid's mother was inconsolable, but the Milwaukee PD kept her locked in a squad car while they searched both her house and the white guy's house. Finally, after several hours of coverage, there he was. Officer Jesus Gloria was standing in the street with two other cops laughing about something. Where was the humor in this situation? What was going on behind the scenes that made him laugh? Was he taking care of business? Then there was the president of the south side organizing committee talking with the press. Why was he there? Was he taking care of business like Officer Jesus was? Eventually, the media stopped showing the clip with Officer Jesus laughing. I wonder why?

Watching the coverage brought back memories of my time in the hood many years before. The shooting happened only blocks away from where I had lived. I bought my house on 9/11. Was that a bad sign? The closing took place at the realtor's office. The realtor was Jewish. Was that a bad sign? I called the realtor earlier in the day and asked if we should postpone the closing in consideration of the events taking place that day. The realtor said no, and I went to his office, and he had me sign the forms but leave the dates blank. He later filled in different dates altogether and sent me copies. I suppose you could say the realtor filed a false report. Did it matter? I guess some people figure a little lie now and again won't hurt anyone, right? Maybe it's true, but what if someone lies a lot and gets away with it. What if that person gets help from a policeman who also lies and files false

reports? What if a district attorney or two are also involved, and they don't mind filing false statements either? If done correctly, such conduct is very productive, depending on one's perspective.

Life is cheap in the hood. Truth and justice don't mean much. There are people wearing badges who only have one form of justice. It's got nothing to do with the constitution but more about what they can do and not get caught. If they lie about something or someone and get away with it, then the lie becomes the truth. What can you get away with without getting caught? That's all that matters. What if Officer Jesus went into the black kid's house and took out any incriminating evidence implicating the black kid. What if Officer Jesus went into the white guy's house and seized the surveillance tape so he could alter or erase it. Why would a police officer sworn to tell the truth lie and file false reports and destroy evidence? What if he did it before? Maybe that's his real job. Things are different here. It may not look that way driving through. If you move in and stay long enough, it may surprise you to find out how things work.

I admit I was a naïve middle-aged white guy full of guilt, the white kind that is. The type that accumulated from years of schooling and news broadcasts and working as a welfare caseworker. After all the years of living in the suburbs and attending lectures and watching programs featuring the oppressed lower classes, I felt awful. But I needed a place to live, so I bought a house and moved in. It wasn't a terrible looking house. There were a couple of bullet holes in the front porch, but then again, what place doesn't down in the hood. After I moved in, I began to realize that the house had an alternative purpose at one

point. I found hypodermic needles in the upstairs bathroom toilet tank. Drug addicts had climbed up to the second floor and broke in at some point and were using the unit for what I can only imagine. All I could do was buy more locks and hope no one else came in.

I moved into the lower unit and began painting the upper with my trusty paint stick. The paint stick required a lot of cleaning after each use, so I spent a lot of time in the basement standing over the sink. Right next to the sink was a window through which I could see neighborhood children hanging around. As the days progressed, I could hear and sometimes see children going through my yard. I barely gave notice as I figured as long as they didn't break anything, why should I care. After all, they were just kids. How much trouble could little kids cause, right? My goodwill lasted about three days. As I was cleaning up after painting one day, I looked up to see three boys about the age of eight standing outside the basement window. I couldn't see their faces, but one was wearing a Dallas Cowboys jersey with a star on the back. Another had a handgun in his hand, and it looked like he was showing it off to the other two. Wow, so much for good intentions. Eventually, I discovered that the star is a gang symbol and that my house was actually in the middle of the gang territory. That made me realize that the little tykes packing heat outside my basement window were junior gang members or 'peewees' as some call them.

I did my best to ignore the goings-on outside. I had already moved in and didn't have the money to go anywhere else. I began to hear what sounded like rocks hitting the windows.

I kept looking outside but couldn't see anyone. Finally, one day while I was in the basement, I saw a kid throwing rocks at my basement window. I yelled, and he ran away. It was the same kids I had seen before with the handgun and jersey. It became a near-daily event. The same kid kept coming back every day, trying to break the basement window. I didn't know who he was or where he came from, but he was so young he must have lived nearby, I figured. Maybe it was some kind of gang initiation. This kid had no fear at all, especially of me. One day he did break the basement window while I stood just a couple feet away.

I gave up and began boarding up the basement windows on the inside and out. That stopped the basement window breaking at least. One day not long after I boarded up the basement windows, I heard a peculiar sound outside my bathroom. I went outside to look and found that someone had disconnected the downspout that ran underneath the bathroom window. The downspout was so high off the ground that only an adult with someone helping could have done the deed. Someone had pulled the downspout apart so the water would run out and down the basement wall of my house. Throughout the first winter, I dealt with vandals and break-in attempts. On many nights, as I laid in bed, I could hear someone trying to push through either one of the basement windows or the front or rear doors of the house. In the springtime, I discovered that a homeless person was sleeping in my backyard. They were using a brick for a pillow and a window drape as a cover. I also found soiled underwear and drug needles on the side of the house. It was the same side where the kid had broken the basement window. They start early in the ghetto.

Despite these transgressions, I still felt a sufficient amount of white guilt to ignore the damages. I was the outsider, and most of the miscreants were 'just kids' as people like to say in the hood. I think the turning point came when I stepped outside my house one day and saw the same kid who had broken my basement window. He was standing with a half dozen other kids and had a rock in his hand. He was getting ready to throw a rock through one of the large picture windows. I yelled, and he ran with the others in between the houses, as usual, to get away, but I knew I had to do something. The police in the ghetto range from useless to nonexistent unless you have good connections. Even if I could get the police to show up, the kids causing the damage were no more than nine or ten years old anyways. Nothing would happen. There was a story in the paper around that time about a local alderman who caught a kid trying to steal a bike and then had to wait an hour for the police to show up.

With the warmer weather coming on, I began to wonder what the summer would have in store. I have an artificial hip and was still recovering from recent surgery. I was a bit nervous about getting injured by one of the junior gang members who were getting more aggressive. My only solution was to have a fence and motion lights installed. It cost me nearly \$3000.00, but it was worth it. The landlord of one of the properties next to mine, Terry Rule, thanked me for having the fence installed. He and his wife Tina Rule had bought the property boarded up from the city and then got loans and grants to fix it up. The junior Mexican gang members who were vandalizing my property were doing the same to their rental property. Four other properties surrounded my property. Three of the

four houses were side by side and were rentals. One rental had black tenants, and the other two homes were duplexes filled up with Mexicans. The black tenants were easy to deal with, and they never tried to steal anything from me, but the Mexicans were mostly obnoxious and drunk and loud and didn't speak English. Eventually, I discovered that the Mexican kid that broke out my basement windows lived in one of the duplex's as well. The remaining neighbor was a white guy named Joe, who told me he had just gotten out of prison for some offense.

Living next door to Joe was like living next to a mob boss. Joe said to me that the police had implicated him in two different murders that happened in the hood. Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on your view, they didn't have enough evidence, so they had to let him go both times. Ghetto Justice is cruel. Joe always had the stuff to sell. It was brand-new stuff that he just 'happened' to have. I never bought anything from him. Sometimes I could just tell he must have broken a bone or two to get the stuff he offered me. The only income that he ever claimed was disability payments for some mental health issues. Joe was about my age, but I don't think he had ever worked a day in his life. Joe did make an interesting comment to me when I first met him. He said my house was vacant for more than a year before I moved in. That made me wonder about the racial makeup in the neighborhood. The Mexican kid from next door who broke my windows didn't start breaking windows until after he knew a white guy had moved in. Racists aren't born there made. These kids were too young to know any better. Who else except their parents could instill so much hostility against white people?

In the summers, Joe would sit with his ex-con buddies in his backyard around a picnic table with their adorable white girlfriends. It was like watching a real-life version of the sopranos. When women say they like bad boys, they're not kidding. Joe was an ex-con who was always getting in fights with other criminals in the hood and perpetually wiping blood off some part of himself. I marveled at the number of women who frequented Joe's house. There was always some cute white girl in a brand-new car parked somewhere on the street. They were waiting for Joe or some other criminal ex-con type to come home. Joe didn't have the same problems with break-in attempts as I did. Joe did have two pit bulls that seemed to scare away the homies. I guess it takes animals to protect you from other animals.

I did consider buying a vicious dog of my own to scare away the Mexican gang members, but I realized the cost was just too much. Instead, I decided to make and install new half-inch plexiglass windows along with steel doors. It took some time to make these improvements due to my disability, but over time I was able to make my house more secure. In addition to making my home safer, the thick windows and steel doors did help reduce the noise level. It helped to lessen the sound of the never-ending music, sirens, gunshots, screams, and other assorted mayhem that could make for a lot of sleepless nights and stressful days otherwise.

Over the years, I settled into a weird sort of routine, which meant staying safe as my most important priority. I felt at times like I was living inside a cage inside of a zoo. Nothing surprised me anymore. One day while walking to my car, I noticed a large pile of

excrement on the ground next to a utility pole. Initially, I assumed it was from an animal, but upon further inspection at a safe distance, of course, I realized it was human. It appeared someone had the urge and simply pulled down their pants and leaned back and squatted against the utility pole and let nature take its course. Another time I happened to look outside as a car stopped in the middle of the street. The driver got out and relieved himself and then drove off, leaving a puddle in the middle of the road. Just another day down in the hood.

In addition to the open sewer concept practiced by many of the residents, another fun way for people to spend time was to break into cars parked on the street. It's a lot cheaper than going to the auto parts store, I suppose. There were always new piles of auto glass in the road to avoid as I drove through the hood each day. My car was finally broke into one night. There was money, glasses, and cigarettes in full view with a total value of at least several hundred dollars. But instead, the headrests with a value of maybe \$200.00 were taken. It, in turn, caused over \$1000.00 in damages. Of course, I now had to buy a car alarm. I didn't realize how many break-in attempts there were until I bought the car alarm. My car alarm went off every single day and usually several times a day. The blacks and Mexicans would sneak up to my car nearly every day. They would check to see if my car was locked. It always was, which always set off the alarm much to their amusement.

By this time, I had lived in the neighborhood long enough to know most of my neighbors had anything but neighborly intent. They were forever casing my house and trying to

break in even when I was home. In addition to that, I also had to endure endless racist insults and taunts from the blacks and Mexicans. Antagonizing white guys is a form of entertainment in the hood, like a sport or hobby. I suppose I was an easy target. I was a middle-aged white guy with an artificial hip and walked with a cane. I must admit the white guilt that had accompanied me into the ghetto was quickly dissipating, and I wasn't sure how to deal with that. For a while, I had what I can only describe as after guilt. In other words, I felt guilty because I didn't feel guilty. I guess it's kind of like getting over the flu but still having a cough or stuffy nose for a few days. My only goal now was to stay safe and alive. I was always on edge. I never knew what to expect from one day to the next. When I would take my lawnmower out to cut the grass, for instance, I had to lock the doors so no one could get in my house while I mowed the lawn.

If you tell yourself a lie long enough, it will seem like the truth eventually. Back in the 1970s, a weird phenomenon occurred with some frequency. Fringe groups or cults usually with religious leanings would entice people, mostly young people, to join them. In many cases, after people joined the cult, the families they left behind would hire people known as deprogrammers. The deprogrammers would help the families kidnap their relatives; usually, it was their kids, back from the cults. The deprogrammers, who often had mental health training, would then set about bringing the person back to reality. The problem many people had after staying secluded with these cults was that they would lose all sense of time and place. The deprogrammers would have to recondition people to make them realize they had lived a lie. When confronted with the truth, many of the victims of these cults would become physically ill. The grip that some cults had on people

was near-absolute. Eventually, most people recovered, and the cults faded away over time.

The reality I had to deal with was that I was on my own. The police were nowhere in sight. I might see a squad car once every six months or so. I got used to that. Calling the police wasn't a guarantee of anything. One night a car parked on the street was hit by another car. The driver then took off running. I called the police to report it, but when they showed up, they towed the driver's car and left the car that got hit. That car sat on the street in front of my house for a week. I had to call the police again, who insisted I get the license plate number of the car, which I gave them. I'm pretty sure the police called the driver to move his car because he showed up a few minutes later. A parking checker also showed up. I could see the parking checker talking to the owner of the car and motioning towards my house at the same time. I couldn't believe it. The parking checker was telling the owner of the car that it was me that called in to complain. So much for confidentiality.

I suppose some response is better than none. When it snowed, the city plow trucks would go through once and usually only once. The snowplow drivers were so bad at plowing I often wished they would stay away. They would leave piles of snow all over the street. There were mounds of snow on the street that took up two or more parking spaces, which would sit until the spring thaw each year. Calling the city was pointless because after the plows went through once, they wouldn't come back. The only thing more annoying was the city spokeswoman who would interview with the local media after each snowstorm

and smugly insist that the city streets were clear. Besides the piles of snow each winter, there were abandoned cars. No matter how long cars sat on the street, the parking checkers rarely gave tickets. I received plenty of parking tickets over the years, probably because they knew I would pay them. I always had a permit, and I parked on the right side, but I still got tickets, and I could never get them dismissed. On the other hand, I would see cars each year sit for months at a time before getting towed. It makes sense, though, because I'm sure many owners never claimed the cars. That meant the city never got its money back. It was more cost-efficient to leave some cars alone.

I suppose a person could get used to anything if they deal with it long enough. So many things that might have shocked me before were now just a minor inconvenience. The gangs, drugs, noise, ex-cons along with rats as big as dogs were the new normal for me. I was growing content as I settled into my fortress in the hood, although by now, I must admit the guilt I had felt when I moved in was long gone. On any given day, I knew the homies were on the prowl, so I was always ready. By now, about five years had passed. Despite the ghetto and its inhabitants, I had no intention of moving. How could I ever have known that a crooked cop named Jesus would scare me out of the ghetto?

Late one evening in November, I heard a commotion outside and went to look. My black neighbors were outside. I stepped out to ask what was wrong, and one said that they had just returned from a night out and found a bullet hole in one of the children's bedroom walls. They had called the police and were waiting in the front yard. Eventually, the police did show up, but they never found out the source of the bullet. Who knows,

maybe it was the Mexicans next door having fun. Within days my black neighbors had moved. I couldn't blame them. The house was vacant for several months, and then a single Mexican woman named Maria Rodriguez with more kids than I could count moved in. Whereas before it was mostly peaceful next door, with Rodriguez, there was a near-riot every day. Suddenly there were dozens, maybe 50 or more people hanging around all day every day. There were Mexicans of all ages, with many gang members mixed in. Watching these people in action was like watching animal programs on television. The only difference was the animals on television had better manners. It was like this woman, and her kids and friends had lived in a cave before and had never had access to utilities or running water.

I didn't have off-street parking, so I had to park on the street every day. Everything that had happened over the previous five years still happened except now it happened tenfold and more, and it was coming from right next door. There were just too many for me. Rodriguez's kids and friends were tearing pieces of building material off their house. I caught them many times, trying to tear off pieces of my house. They got underneath my front porch and were digging out the gravel and plastic that was put in place to keep water out of the basement.

One day I heard my car alarm go off and I was surprised when I looked out. Rodriguez was standing in her yard and several of her kids who were no more than maybe five years old were lying in the road trying to crawl underneath my car to catch a

rabbit. Other cars driving by had to swerve and brake to avoid them. I went outside to confront Rodriguez, and all she said to me was, 'what are you going to do about it'? One of her gang-member friends was in a car only a few feet away, and he was ready to fight me too. White guys are easy targets in the ghetto. There aren't many of them. I'm sure my disability helped to embolden Rodriguez and her friends. Another day when I arrived home and was walking to the front steps of my house, Rodriguez had her usual 50, or so friends hanging out. One of the males walked up to me and got right in my face and said, 'f--- you.' On yet another occasion, I went out to my car to discover sugar around the gas cap. It's an old wives' tale that pouring sugar in a gas tank will ruin a car. I guess it helped to identify the intelligence level I was dealing with, though.

These and other incidents began to worry me. I didn't know what to do. I was nervous about leaving my house at all. Arming myself wouldn't have helped because when dealing with minorities in these situations, it's always the white guy's fault. I decided to buy surveillance cameras instead. That way I could look outside before I went out the door and see if Rodriguez or her friends were out there. The cameras cost me several hundred dollars. The salesman also offered me a recording device to plug the cameras into but I declined. The salesman only wanted a couple hundred dollars more for the recording device. I didn't see any point. I learned to regret that decision. That recording device would have made me a wealthy man.

About this time, I received a flyer under my front door. Little did I know how it would change my life. The church across the street from my house allowed community groups to use its space. One of those groups was the south side organizing committee. It was that group that had prepared and distributed the flyer that went around the neighborhood and showed up under my door. The flyer was a questionnaire that asked residents to report nuisance tenants. Good timing or so I thought at the time. The flyer stated that the south side organizing committee worked closely with the police department and the city attorney's office. To say they worked closely together was an understatement I would learn over time. The police department and city attorney's office assigned staff who worked as liaisons. It all sounded very proper and the flyer even promised confidentiality which I appreciated. The last thing I wanted to do was call the police directly on my Mexican neighbor because the police would probably tell her it was me that called. The cops couldn't even keep quiet about the car I called about, why should I trust them with anything else. I completed the questionnaire and mailed it back.

Peculiar things began to happen after I sent back the flyer. Suddenly I noticed police in the neighborhood. One day there were three uniformed policemen in the front yard of Rodriguez's house, but they were staring towards my house. Another day I noticed an unmarked police car parked facing my house just up the street. It appeared the driver was looking my way. On yet another day I saw someone in the bushes across the street from my house. It was an adult male, but I couldn't figure out what he was doing in the bushes. How could I have ever known what was about to happen. I was about to get a dose of ghetto justice, and I just didn't know it yet. Any idea's that I had about the legal system

were about to go right out the window. My life was about to turn upside down and inside out and change permanently. There was a knock on my door one day in the late afternoon of June 26, 2007. I opened the door and down the rabbit hole I went.

Officer Jesus Gloria in plainclothes right outside my front door and he was so cordial initially. There was a young black guy standing behind him facing sideways, I thought that was odd. Officer Jesus said he was there from the district attorney's office regarding the flyer I had mailed back to the south side organizing committee. He so nicely asked to see my driver's license, just to verify my identity, he claimed. Me, like a dummy I believed him and I went to get it and I gave it to him. As soon as I gave Officer Jesus my license he passed it back to the black guy and the black guy ran off with it. I didn't get it back until the next day. Officer Jesus' attitude changed quite drastically. He ordered me to 'keep your hands where I can see them.' He then proceeded to accuse me of disorderly conduct. He asked if I called the owner of the rental property where Rodriguez lived next door fat or black. I replied no.

Officer Jesus then informed me that I could not complain about the tenant Rodriguez next door or her landlord Tina Rule ever again. He then stated that he was arresting me for 'B and Z' violations. As he grabbed my arm and pulled me out the door of my house, my only response was what is a 'B and Z' violation. He said he didn't know, but whatever it was, it was on file for two years. He claimed he was 'sorry' and hadn't planned on arresting me. He handcuffed me behind my back and stated 'you'll be back home in an hour'. I immediately informed Officer Jesus of my disability. I asked to put on my shoes and get

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