

I just watched the videos of the Kenosha vigilante this morning.

Before two protesters lost their lives, this young man and his group of fellow 'protectors' were thanked for being there.

While a nearby citizen was ordered to evacuate the premises, the soon-to-be-murderer was offered a bottle of water by officers.

He was not ordered to leave- he was not a citizen at that moment.

He was an ad-hoc member of the police force, but without any actual deputization. It didn't matter that he was under 18 and was breaking the law by merely walking around with a rifle strapped to his chest. He wasn't asked if he was old enough, if he was trained in gun safety, where he lived, or why he was there. Any vetting process at all that may have indicated to officers that he had traveled 20 miles and over state lines to play a role he had no business playing was omitted.

Obviously, without taking any care to manage the heavily armed people walking their streets in an intensely charged situation, the officers were wanting at least intimidation to occur. Perhaps they thought with more guns around, the less likely people would be to break a window.

If no violence had occurred, there likely wouldn't have been a mention made of the 'citizens-but-not' that were allowed to roam their streets. But when they were told by witnesses that this kid had shot people, law enforcement showed that they wanted more than just intimidation. They wanted violence. Instead of accepting his willing surrender, they let him walk past them and sleep in his own bed one more night before surrendering to the police in his hometown. If there had not been video of the murders, the Kenosha vigilante would very likely still be a free child.

The most damning part of this entire situation is that he is a product of so many moving gears. He was the creation of a machine that is not only still moving, but speeding up.

Odds are he lived in an echo chamber, carefully guarded from the humanity of the hurting, never giving space to question WHY there were protests, WHY there was anger, WHY the violence against yet another black body should be seen as anything other than simple justice. His thoughts were groomed toward violence in the name of freedom.

He was given a weapon that was produced to fire projectiles at high speeds, mostly into human bodies. It was not decorative. It was not a toy for use only at the range. It was carried to menace, and it only functioned toward that end because it had the ability to kill or at least maim. It was not made to heal, but rather to destroy.

All these pieces came together to do what they were meant to do. His anger was spun up by pictures of burning buildings and whispers of looters, and the energy of it pushed him to travel miles. He took a weapon that was meant to destroy. He was thanked and given water by the 'good guys' which validated that he was doing good work. He was more than a mere

citizen. When he shot protesters they were the 'bad guys' in his eyes. When the officers let him pass, he was held blameless for his actions.

When video of his murders went viral, justice came to tell him a different story.

What would have happened if he had even once been told by someone he respected that life was a precious thing. That the dignity of a human is powerful and is far more valuable than a building could ever be. Where would he be today if he actually sought peace instead of dealing retribution? What would the story be if he had experienced leadership instead of propaganda.

The mechanisms that produced him are still rolling. There will be others like him. Maybe entire groups. Will we be able to reverse the gears, or is this our definite future? Will those in authority praise him, or finally learn that dehumanizing rhetoric leads to lethal actions?

Is it too late to establish a culture that values life, or will we devolve into an endless sea of violence, until the only ones left are the ones who live to kill?"

-Written by NWF board member, Melissa Miles 8/27/2020