

How Austin bombings fit a system of racism

El racismo y las bombas que aterraron a Austin

Rogelio Sáenz, For the Express-News Published 12:00 am, Saturday, April 14, 2018

ENGLISH

Was it racism and terrorism that threatened Austin's people of color?

The question about the Austin bombings is foolish.

There have been two responses to this query.

The official response for nearly a month was a firm "no" until, on March 29, Interim Police Chief Brian Manley demurred that the bombs were domestic terrorism.

Yet, many people from the African-American and Latino community of Austin clearly believe it constituted racism and terrorism from the outset.

The answer to whether racism motivated the bomber is that the two responses reflect two distinct worlds and divergent places — but, yes, within a system of racism.

The evil deeds by Mark Anthony Conditt, who terrorized the city of Austin for nearly three weeks — and the official actions in the case — illustrate that system of racism.

Let's review some key sociological points about racism.

First, racism is a system that depends on the myth that racism does not exist. This illusion suggests that we are colorblind — that we do not see skin color differences — and that we are all equal. The myth prevents people, especially many of those who enjoy white privilege, from seeing inequalities based on race.

Second, the system of racism produces, regenerates and justifies racial inequality. The persistence of racism relies principally on institutional laws and practices, and on the passivity and the belief of ordinary people that racism does not exist.

As Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, a sociologist at Duke University and president of the American Sociological Association, explains: "Racism is a system without racists." The system of racism relies strongly on the passivity and denial of common people.

Third, the continuity of the system of racism depends on a framing in which white people get to say what is normal, what is known and what is empathetic, while the views of people of color represent what is alien, what is unknown and what is questionable.

Accordingly, whites are much more likely to be seen as objects of compassion and people who receive the benefit of the doubt more than do people of color.

Fourth, in the system of racism, people and organizations that insist and document that racism is real are seen as malcontents, agitators and people on the fringe.

Let's return to the city of Austin.

ESPAÑOL

¿Fue un acto racista y terrorista el que atentó contra la comunidad de color de Austin?

¡Hasta la pregunta es necia!

Sin embargo, hay dos respuestas a la cuestión. La respuesta oficial en un principio fue firmemente "no," hasta que el 29 de marzo el jefe interino de la policía de Austin Brian Manley lo calificó de terrorismo doméstico.

La opinión de muchas personas en la comunidad afroamericana y latina es claramente "sí".

Dos respuestas que reflejan dos mundos y lugares distintos dentro del sistema del racismo.

Los hechos malvados a mano de Mark Conditt, quien aterrorizó a la ciudad de Austin por casi tres semanas, y las acciones oficiales ilustran el sistema de racismo que persiste en los Estados Unidos.

Vamos a repasar unos puntos del conocimiento sociológico sobre el racismo.

Primero, el racismo es un sistema que depende del mito de

que el racismo no existe. Este mito evita que mucha gente vea desigualdades basadas en la raza.

Segundo, el sistema de racismo produjo, reproduce y justifica la desigualdad racial. La continuación del racismo depende principalmente de leyes y prácticas institucionales, y de la pasividad y la creencia de personas ordinarias de que el racismo no existe. Como dice el sociólogo Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "el racismo es un sistema sin racistas".

Tercero, la continuidad del sistema de racismo depende de un marco donde las personas anglosajonas representan lo normal, lo conocido y lo simpático mientras que las personas de color personifican lo extranjero, lo ajeno y lo cuestionable. Resulta claro que es más probable que los anglosajones sean objeto de compasión y reciban el beneficio de la duda que las personas de color.

Regresemos a la ciudad de Austin.

El 2 de marzo temprano por la mañana, Mark Conditt, un hombre anglosajón de 23 años de edad, dejó un paquete en



Authorities say Conditt blew himself up in his car (center) as authorities closed in. Officials, after reviewing a video on his cellphone, described him not as a terrorist but as troubled. Source: Jay Janner /Associated Press

Early on March 2, Conditt, a 23-year-old white man, left a package on the porch of Anthony “Stephan” House, a 39-year-old man from a prominent black family living on the East Side of Austin.

This is an area where African-Americans and Latinos are concentrated.

House opened the package, detonating a bomb. Bleeding and full of shrapnel, he died shortly afterward.

The police investigation suggested that the tragedy was an isolated incident and there was no evidence of terrorism. Part of the inquiry focused on House, the victim himself, insinuating he was involved in illicit matters or had put together the bomb. Investigation directed at the victim is common within the system of racism, and is congruent with stereotypes and the lack of empathy toward persons of color.

No? Recall how, too many times, after police have killed an unarmed African-American, the investigation quickly centers on the victim rather than the killer.

But the death of House was not an isolated incident.

Ten days later, early in the morning, Conditt dropped off another package on the East Side of the city. While he prepared to go to school, Draylen Mason, a 17-year-old from another prominent African-American family, opened the mysterious package. It exploded, killing him and seriously wounding his mother, Shamika Wilson. Mason was a talented youth who recently had been accepted to the University of Texas at Austin and to a prestigious university in Ohio to pursue his studies in music.

Conditt continued his evil, again on the East Side of Austin, that same morning. He left another package at another residence. As noon approached, Esperanza “Hope” Herrera, a 75-year-old Latina who was visiting her mother, opened the package. It exploded, seriously wounding her.

Four victims — all people of color and residents of the East Side of Austin. Two of them dead. These were not random acts, even if



Miguel Hernández, 17 años, y Thelma Manzano, 19 años, en una vigilia el 27 de marzo en honor a su amigo Draylen Mason, la víctima de 17 años que murió en el segundo atentado con bombas en Austin. AMANDA VOISARD / ¡AHORA SÍ!

la entrada de la casa de Anthony Stephen House, un hombre afroamericano del este de Austin. House abrió el paquete detonando una bomba. House, con su cuerpo sangriento lleno de fragmentos de metralla, murió un poco después. La investigación policiaca sugirió que la tragedia se trataba de un incidente aislado y que no había ninguna evidencia de terrorismo.

La indagación se enfocó en House, la víctima misma, insinuando que quizá el difunto estaba involucrado en malos asuntos o que él mismo había construido la bomba. La investigación dirigida hacia la víctima es algo común dentro del sistema de racismo y es congruente con los estereotipos y la falta de empatía hacia las personas de color. Recordemos tantos casos donde la policía mata a una persona de color

desarmada seguido del enfoque de la investigación en la víctima y no en el asesino.

Pero, por el contrario, la muerte de House no fue un incidente aislado.

Diez días después, tempranito por la mañana Conditt dejó otro paquete en otra casa del lado este de la ciudad. Cuando se preparaba a ir a la escuela, Draylen Mason, un joven de 17 años, abrió el paquete misterioso que explotó, matándolo a él e hiriendo de gravedad a su madre, Shamika Wilson. Mason, un joven talentoso que recientemente había sido aceptado a la Universidad de Texas en Austin y a una prestigiosa universidad en Ohio para seguir sus estudios en música, perdió su vida a la mano malvada de Conditt.

Conditt continuó con sus maldades en el este de Austin

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Key sociological points about racism

1. First, racism is a system that depends on the myth that racism does not exist. This illusion suggests that we are colorblind — that we do not see skin color differences — and that we are all equal. The myth prevents people, especially many of those who enjoy white privilege, from seeing inequalities based on race.
2. Second, the system of racism produces, regenerates and justifies racial inequality. The persistence of racism relies principally on institutional laws and practices, and on the passivity and the belief of ordinary people that racism does not exist. As Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, a sociologist at Duke University and president of the American Sociological Association, explains: “Racism is a system without racists.”
3. Third, the continuity of the system of racism depends on a framing in which white people get to say what is normal, what is known and what is empathetic, while the views of people of color represent what is alien, what is unknown and what is questionable. Accordingly, whites are much more likely to be seen as objects of compassion and people who receive the benefit of the doubt more than do people of color.
4. Fourth, in the system of racism, people and organizations that insist and document that racism is real are seen as malcontents, agitators and people on the fringe.

ENGLISH

Conditt would ultimately plant bombs outside of Austin's East Side. Many people of color in Austin lamented that the police did not treat the explosion that took the life of House more seriously.

What would have been the police response if the first explosion had occurred on the West Side, where the city's white population is concentrated?

Six days after terrorizing people of color on the East Side of Austin, Conditt shifted to random attacks, first on the Southwest Side of the city, where he used a trip wire across a sidewalk that resulted in the wounding of two white men. Two days later, he wounded a Federal Express worker in Schertz, a suburb of San Antonio approximately 60 miles from Austin.

By then, police had a significant amount of data on Conditt, leading to a slow chase and then to him taking his own life in Round Rock by detonating a bomb in his vehicle.

The police searched Conditt's cellphone trying to pinpoint a motive for the horror he unleashed on Austin. They discovered a video that Conditt had recorded on his cellphone hours before his death. The police declared that no words were found to suggest that Conditt had committed a racist or terrorist act. With seeming compassion for Conditt, the police described him as a troubled and anguished youth.

Where was that empathy and compassion toward Stephen, Draylen, Shamika and Esperanza, and toward people of color on Austin's East Side who were traumatized by Conditt?

The premise that Conditt's bombings were not racist rests with the fact that people of color were not exclusively the victims, though they were the ones who directly received packages with bombs at their residences and they accounted for all the deaths.

Question: Why choose the predominantly minority East Side and specific homes at the outset? Conditt could not reasonably have had any expectation that minorities wouldn't be casualties.

Yes, he moved on to where that was less likely, with more apparent randomness, but that doesn't negate his initial targeting — specific homes of people of color in a predominantly minority community.

The system of racism persists without racists, as Bonilla-Silva reminds us.

The people of color of Austin, the victims and the innocents who lost their lives demand respect and justice.

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ESPAÑOL

esa misma mañana, dejando otro paquete en otra residencia. Como a mediodía, Esperanza "Hope" Herrera, una mujer latina de 75 años de edad que visitaba su madre, abrió el paquete que explotó, hiriéndola de gravedad.

Cuatro víctimas — todas ellas de color y que vivían en el este de Austin — dos de ellas muertas. ¡Digan lo que digan, estos no fueron actos al azar!

Mucha gente de color se lamenta el por qué la policía no tomó más seriamente la explosión que le quitó la vida a House, la cual puso en riesgo a nuestra gente. ¿Cuál hubiera sido la respuesta policiaca si la explosión inicial hubiera ocurrido del lado oeste, donde está concentrada la población anglosajona?

Seis días después de aterrorizar a personas de color del este de Austin, Conditt cambió su táctica para atacar al azar primero en el suroeste de Austin donde hirió a dos hombres anglosajones y dos días después hiriendo a un trabajador de Federal Express en Schertz, localizado a 60 millas de Austin.

Para entonces, la policía ya tenía muchos datos sobre Conditt lo que resultó en este quitándose la vida en Round Rock.

La policía hizo su búsqueda para tratar de encontrar el móvil de Conditt tras el horror que este desató. En su rastreo, la policía descubrió un video que Conditt había grabado horas antes de su muerte. La policía declaró que no había encontrado ningunas palabras que sugirieran que él había cometido un acto racista o terrorista. En su investigación del video, con una gran compasión hacia Conditt, lo que describió la policía fue a un joven trastornado y angustiado.

¿Dónde estaba esa piedad hacia Anthony, Draylen, Shamika, Esperanza, y hacia nuestra gente a quien Conditt traumatizó?

El sistema racista persiste.

Nuestra comunidad, las víctimas y los difuntos que inocentemente perdieron sus vidas exigen respeto y justicia.

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Puntos sociológicos clave sobre el racismo

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2. Segundo, el sistema de racismo produjo, reproduce y justifica la desigualdad racial. La continuación del racismo depende principalmente de leyes y prácticas institucionales, y de la pasividad y la creencia de personas ordinarias de

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