

Renteria is the only one to blame

Make no mistake, the principal responsibility for the death of Francisco Renteria lies with one and only one person: Francisco Renteria. It does not lie with institutional racism. And it certainly does not lie with Officer Luke Wilke or either of the police departments involved.

I know, that's a difficult thing to suggest in the prevailing climate of emotionalism that surrounds this case. But if we can step back, momentarily, and intellectually consider the facts that surround this tragic event, perhaps we can put to rest the plethoric anti-police rhetoric presently dominating Lincoln's editorial pages.

Perhaps, also, we can get to the root of the Renteria problem which, as I see it, was a failure on his part to act rationally given his circumstances.

One wonders how differently the situation would have resolved had Renteria cooperated with the first officer that attempted to question him.

Even though he didn't speak English, he could have maintained his composure and either awaited the arrival of a Spanish-speaking officer or a relative that could translate. He would have been questioned, correctly identified, and in the absence of any outstanding warrants, released.

You see, that's how it works in a civilized society. Whether driving or walking down the road, when a police officer attempts to stop you, you stop!

It's just that simple. You do not flee. You do not take a swing at the officer. That does not mean, of course, should you decide to run or fight that you automatically forfeit your life. What it does mean is that you may, depending on the quantity and quality of your resistance, get seriously hurt. You may even accidentally die.

That's just one of the reasons (among many) why responsible and reasonable people obey the law and cooperate with police.

The fact that Renteria was drug and alcohol free makes me question his decision to physically resist those officers even more. It is simply not a rational decision made by a rational mind. His status as an illegal immigrant notwithstanding, there was evidently no reason for him to fight.

The very notion that he may have resisted arrest because of the corrupt nature of Mexican police is laughable.



Thomas Eads

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Likewise, fear of deportation, given the fact that he was visiting family in Mexico not six months earlier, does not present good justification to go to swinging at the cops. So why fight a battle you're guaranteed to lose?

Omaha police officer George Cardenas was questioned on exactly that by the Daily Nebraskan back in October 1994.

He speculated that Renteria may not have perceived the first officer on the scene as a true authority figure because of her gender. She was a female officer and, apparently, the male "traditional Hispanic custom" is to keep women in a subordinate role.

Cardenas also hypothesized that the arresting officers probably provoked hostile actions on Renteria's part because they were improperly trained to look him directly in the eyes. Again, Hispanic culture apparently interprets that as a sign of aggression.

Cardenas emphasized the need for increased cultural sensitivity training for police so that problems, like the ones elucidated above, can be curbed.

I agree. Cultural sensitivity is an important part of every officer's professional repertoire. However, it's ludicrous to suggest that female officers should not carry out their sworn law enforcement duties because an immigrant (Hispanic or otherwise) may not

respect women.

Just as silly is the notion that, in police work, officers should not look suspects directly in the eyes. Putting aside an officer's safety considerations for a second, just try to imagine a cop that walks around all day never having looked anyone in the eyes. No suspects would ever be apprehended. Cardenas' idea is tantamount to having a department of "blinded" police officers.

It's unfortunate that an event as tragic as Francisco Renteria's death should degrade to this level of nonsensical commentary.

Joel Gajardo, executive director of the Hispanic Center, is quoted as saying the following: "I wonder what would have happened if five Hispanic people were playing around with an officer and he would have died. Would they be charged with a misdemeanor?"

Such comments are irresponsible and intellectually impotent.

A couple of years ago a Native-American man was shot and killed after he pointed a realistic toy gun at a Lincoln police officer. Was that racism?

Not long afterward, a Lincoln officer shot an African-American man as he held a knife to the throat of his screaming attempted-rape victim. Again, was that racism?

In both cases, the actions of the perpetrators never entered the minds of those "community leaders" who immediately accused the police of blatantly racist shootings.

Nothing Renteria did deserved him dying. Parties on all sides of this issue agree on that. But it was HE who put the wheels in motion that ultimately led to his demise.

And while the family grieves and looks for a responsible person at which to point the finger of blame, innocent, hard-working folks are paying the price.

As I send this column to the editor, officer Wilke has been acquitted of misdemeanor assault. I predict similar outcomes for all others charged in this case.

Hopefully the Hispanic community will put a stop to slanderous commentary that does little other than fan the flames of racial injustice where none exists.

Eads is a senior political science major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.



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