

THIS SHOOTING IS BEING BROADCAST IN BLACK AND WHITE

BY MICHAEL LACEY

What price is tallied against a policeman who shoots and paralyzes an eighteen-year-old kid, an unarmed teenager who is never charged with a crime? Is the chief of police permitted to lie about the incident?

Does it matter if the victim is black? Detective Ed Patterson, who fired his .38 caliber pistol on January 16, thereby crippling the young black man, waited for answers as the investigation by law enforcement authorities unfolded. The youth, Standley Wesley — along with his relatives and neighbors who live in the central Phoenix housing project where the shooting occurred — also marked the hours.

Unfortunately, there are two versions of the tragedy afloat in our community; there is both a black understanding and a white interpretation of the same set of facts. Played back on video, the visuals would be two different movies.

The white man's movie is also the official version of events, which concluded last week with Chief Ruben Ortega's press conference where he announced the results of the police department's probe. It was not very long ago that Ortega fired seven experienced patrolmen who worked in the projects — and merely because they were found drinking beer after hours and acting a bit rowdy. With a precedent of such Prussian-like discipline there was certainly an element of suspense regarding Patterson's future. Yet the detective escaped with a ten-day suspension without pay — and in explaining the investigation and his decision, Ortega chose to lie.

Rather than putting to rest what has been an ugly chapter in police/community relations, Ortega's behavior must serve to reopen the events

that began on Monday afternoon, January 16. It was then that Detective Patterson heard what he later described as a shotgun blast. He observed Wesley running and carrying what the officer thought might be a sawed-off shotgun. As Wesley ran down Washington, Patterson pursued in his unmarked car. As Wesley rounded the corner at 17th Street and Washington he headed north, and Detective Patterson cut off his path by jumping his car up onto the sidewalk. The youth bounced out into the middle of 17th as the cop leapt from the automobile with his revolver drawn and cocked. Wesley's hands shot high above his head; Patterson stepped behind his suspect and attempted to move him towards a wall up on the sidewalk to conduct a search.

They never made it. The officer's gun discharged and the corner became chaotic.

When the car jumped the curb, young blacks hanging out a couple of blocks north of the shooting had begun to move. By the time Wesley had his arms raised and was standing in the middle of the street, various witnesses were closing in on the sight of the confrontation. Several would claim that at the time of the shooting they were close enough to see it all, and to a man they called the shooting "cold-blooded."

Clad in a light jacket, running pants and midriff tee-shirt that revealed his naked abdomen, Wesley was found to be unarmed. Though police searched the area in the daylight, they found no weapon. At about 10 p.m. that same night, police located not a shotgun but a long-barreled .22 caliber revolver in a hedge along the path Wesley had run.

New Times obtained a copy of a "confidential" report from the police department to the mayor and city council, wherein the police said they had located several witnesses who earlier in the day had seen Wesley with a "cowboy-type revolver with a long barrel" following a



Photo by John Willard

Phoenix Police Chief Ruben Ortega contends that Standley Wesley was shot in the abdominal area to back up the assertion that the youth was struggling with Detective Ed Patterson. Witnesses to the shooting, however, told *New Times* that Wesley was not resisting and that the teenager was shot in the back. *New Times* went to the hospital to get at the truth. Although Wesley had exploratory surgery in his abdomen to repair internal damage, medical records and these photographs show no bullet wounds in the stomach or side. There is a large bullet entrance wound in Wesley's back and a scar near the base of the spine where doctors removed fragments of the .38 slug.



Photo by Acme

fight on the basketball court. These witnesses remain unidentified.

On three successive Saturdays, members of the black community marched to police headquarters to demand Patterson's badge. Black leaders met with Chief Ortega for answers but left expressing grave reservations. The chief, rather than cave in to demands for a citizens' panel, asked the FBI to review the shooting.

And so the stage was set for the dramatic February 7 press conference. Earlier Chief Ortega had called the shooting unnecessary, and the Police Internal Affairs Board had found Patterson in violation of department policies regarding the safe handling of his weapon. Was this forum the window dressing that would lead to Patterson's dismissal?

It was not. The chief's announcement of Patterson's suspension was backed up with convincing, if undocumented, arguments. Not content with rationale, Ortega went on the offensive and brazenly lied about the circumstances of the shooting.

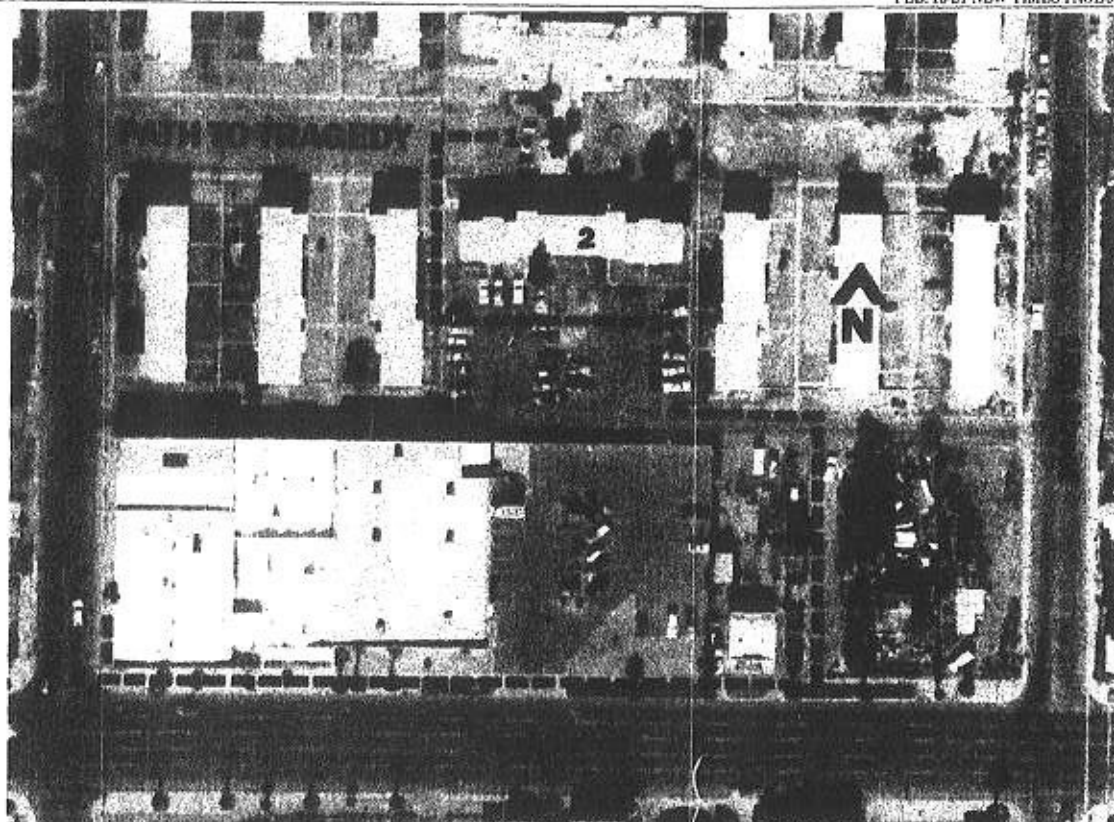
All along black witnesses to the incident on 17th Street had demanded Patterson's firing because he had shot an unarmed black teen *in the back*. "That is absolutely false," Ortega charged. "As a matter of fact, Standley Wesley was never shot in the back. This is supported by medical reports from the doctor that treated Standley Wesley, that in fact he was shot in the front of the midline of the side." With that, the chief pulled back his suit coat and indicated a spot about three or four inches back from the belly button on the lower left side of the stomach. "The bullet traversed towards the rear," explained Ortega, "going along his back, and lodged next to his spine. So the bullet actually entered more towards the front of the body than towards the back."

Earlier that afternoon police spokesman Sgt. Brad Thiss made the same point to *New Times*, saying that Wesley had been shot in the front, not the rear. Asked to show specifically where, Thiss drew a line from the middle of the armpit to the middle of the hip. "About three to four inches in front of the midline," indicated Thiss, "is where the bullet entered."

Ortega's attention to detail makes sense. Where the bullet entered is a critical point. By all accounts, Patterson was behind Wesley when he attempted to march the teenager over to a wall for frisking. Chief Ortega insisted that Wesley had struggled against Patterson, even though the officer had a drawn .38 pointed at him. If Wesley was indeed shot in the back, it tends to discredit Ortega's story. If, however, Wesley had twisted to his left and turned back towards Patterson, it would explain a wound in the stomach — and perhaps lend credence to the idea of a struggle where the weapon accidentally discharged.

Was there a bullet wound where Chief Ortega claimed, or was the entry wound in the back, as black witnesses of the housing projects contended?

New Times gained admittance to the hospital wing where Wesley is recovering. We took photos of the young man that clearly show there are no bullet wounds



This aerial view shows the projects where the shooting occurred. Standley Wesley was playing basketball (point 1) when a fight broke out between Wesley and Downayne Jenkins. Eyewitnesses claim Wesley didn't have a gun. Jenkins went to his apartment (point 2) while Wesley circled around to the rear of the tenement (point 3). Jenkins claims he saw Wesley from his window and that the young man was unarmed as he jogged towards Washington. After rounding the corner of 17th Street and Washington, Wesley was confronted by Officer Ed Patterson (point 4) where the teenager was shot.

on his front side or abdomen. There is, however, a yellow scab where the slug entered his back.

Earlier, Wesley's attorney, Charles Brewer, had told *New Times* that the bullet had traveled downward from the entrance wound towards the base of the spine, information consistent with interviews conducted by *New Times* in which eyewitnesses claim that Patterson clubbed the young man as the pair approached the wall. In these statements the testimony is that Wesley was already falling from the blow when the officer's gun discharged. This would explain the downward trajectory of the bullet in Wesley's body and would also seem to repudiate Ortega's explanation. Hospital records also flat out contradict Ortega.

Chief Ortega's charge that Wesley was not shot in the back was broadcast unquestioningly in the media. The press had little choice. In matters of police shootings, law enforcement agencies investigate themselves. There are no oversight boards of citizens, and Ortega has simply refused to make public his witnesses or his documentation.

The mayor and the city council are in a similar position; they have been provided with the chief's findings but not his evidence.

If *New Times* had not obtained photos of Wesley, we, like the rest of the press, would have been left with but one version of events. The bullet-in-the-back conflict, however, was not the first contradiction uncovered in this investigation.

On January 30 the Maricopa County attorney, former reserve police officer Tom Collins, announced that no charges would be filed against Patterson. During the campaign for the county attorney's office, the incumbent, Charles Hyder, had claimed that his opponent, Collins, was




On three successive Saturdays, blacks marched from the projects to police headquarters to demand Officer Ed Patterson's badge. When Chief Ortega only suspended the officer for ten days, black organizers staged a fourth march.

too friendly with the police department. To put it bluntly, it was thought that Collins would be a doornail for any charge that any officer might want prosecuted — evidence be damned. But even with this as background, Collins' actions seem incredible. When he announced that Patterson would not be prosecuted, Collins had, in effect, cleared the police before they cleared themselves.

The next day, chief deputy county attorney Norm Keyt explained this action in part by claiming the office had found an out-of-town businessman who'd stood fifteen feet from the shooting and who supported Detective Patterson's claims. Once again local officials refused to

continued on page 22

THE PEOPLE IN THIS
 NEIGHBORHOOD HAVE
 DETERMINED THAT THE P.P.D.
 IS DANGEROUS TO YOUR
 HEALTH



Following the shooting, someone spray painted the spot where Standley Wesley was crippled by a Phoenix policeman.

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continued from page 9

identify their source, saying only that he was a businessman from Pittsburgh.

The authorities erred, however, when they let slip that their star witness stayed at a cheap motel on Van Buren. A check of the lodge's records revealed that a Tony Vertu from Pittsburgh had stayed there. His East Coast address turned out to be that of a men's Christian mission. To obtain a businessman's discount from the motel, this character had claimed to be employed by Interstate Coating and Construction.

When contacted by *New Times*, a spokesman for the company said that Vertu had indeed worked for the painting company, but only for a month in late '78. Vertu's former boss said the guy had arrived at the painting company after Pittsburgh authorities had charged him with arson. Seems Tom Collins' star witness had joined two other fellows in an attempt to burn down a small business. The three couldn't even pull that off, managing instead to set themselves on fire. Although his two buddies eventually died from their injuries, Vertu escaped jail on technicalities that arose from prosecutorial abuse and went to work briefly for the painting contractor.

Vertu's former boss remembered the guy as a real day at the beach: "He's a con

artist, is what he is in my opinion. He'd rather think his way around something than do it... he's a compulsive liar."

There are those in Phoenix who remember Tony Vertu. During the course of an interview with *New Times*, one of the witnesses to the shooting, Howard Byrd — admittedly a two-time loser himself — said he remembered seeing a white guy at the scene. He thought the man's name was "Virchew, something like that." Byrd described the man thusly: "He seemed like he had a burn or a birthmark on him that was noticeable on him in the face area. Looked like it might have been a burn healing." Byrd claimed the white guy said at the scene that "he [the cop] shot the kid on purpose." If Byrd is accurate, Vertu apparently changed his story from the time he witnessed the shooting to the time he went downtown and gave a statement to the authorities.

In a separate interview with *New Times*, Steve Tolles, who also witnessed the shooting, recalled Vertu making the same statement. Later, Phoenix officials would learn from Pittsburgh authorities that Vertu had also been investigated in a credit card and a stolen property case in '82.

On February 2 Collins announced that he would reopen his investigation based upon the newly revealed background of Vertu. He explained away his reliance upon Vertu by claiming that the Pittsburgh man seemed trustworthy because he "did not have an ax to grind." He also said other witnesses were too far away to clearly see the shooting.

New Times nonetheless located two sisters, Joyce and Marilyn Jones, whose car had pulled up to the stop sign on 17th Street, almost directly across from the shooting. Though they left their names and addresses with officers at the scene, neither sister was interviewed initially by the county attorney's investigating board. Yet the two sisters do not know Detective Ed Patterson or Standley Wesley; the two sisters do not live anywhere near the housing project but were simply driving through; the two sisters do not have a criminal record or any "ax to grind" — unless being black somehow gives them an edge.

When tracked down by *New Times*, Joyce Jones was still upset by what she had seen on the 16th. "I was approaching

"When we make mistakes, we must accept responsibility for them. We have done that in this incident," said Ortega.

the stop sign," recalled Jones. "And as I looked to my left I saw the boy turn the corner. He was just jogging. He never got into a stride. I never took my eyes off him, 'cause just then this car comes screaming around the corner and cuts him off. And me so nosy, I was being nosy.

"Whatever he yelled at that boy, he threw his hands up in the air, high above his head. My window was up, but you could see from the white guy's expression that he was screaming, and you could see the kid's expression... he look mystified.

The cop ran over to him with the gun pointing at him. He had his finger on the trigger and I was praying to myself,

"Please don't run." And then when he hit him I said, "What? Why'd he hit him?"

With this Jones becomes agitated as she remembers what she saw next. "He hit him, he hit him real hard. He never resisted. All he had to do was put his handcuffs on him and that boy would be all right today.

"The last time he hit him so hard, the kid fell. The cop shot him and I started screaming. I turned to my sister and said, 'My God, Kate, he shot him.'"

(Later Jones' mother will call *New Times*, worried about her daughter's safety if the woman's name appears in the paper. The mother says that Joyce, who is in school studying to be a beautician, has not been sleeping because she remembers too much.)

Marilyn Jones echoes her sister's story.

Virgie Terrell, a young mother, was also close by when the shooting occurred. "He had his hands in the air when he was shot. The cop pushed him and hit him. He wasn't on the ground, he was falling when he got shot."

Had Standley resisted?

"No, no, nothing like that," said Terrell.

What the Jones sisters and Terrell told *New Times* is repeated regularly by others who claim to have witnessed the shooting: Officer Patterson had his gun drawn; the kid did not resist but held his arms in the air; the detective slapped Wesley a number of times as they marched to the wall; the teenager fell

continued on page 24



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continued from page 22

from a blow and then Patterson's gun discharged.

Most of the witnesses live or hang out in the housing projects, so you might argue that they have repeated their stories back and forth to each other until there is a sort of common folk wisdom about what transpired that afternoon.

But the Jones sisters are not part of that circle. The only thing different about the Jones testimony is that they were much closer to the shooting than some of the other witnesses, literally on top of it.

Joyce Jones said the police eventually interviewed her on January 30. Police spokesman Sgt. Brad Thiss told *New Times* the official report of the investigation was turned over to the county attorney's office on the 25th or the 27th, he wasn't sure which. In other words, the report was filed a couple of days before the critical Jones interview took place.

Ortega did not mention the Jones sisters during his press conference. He dismissed as outright fantasy any allegations that Wesley had been struck by Patterson by claiming that the teenager had told the police after the shooting that the officer had not struck him. (According to hospital staff, the police on several occasions shooed family and Good Samaritan attendants out of Wesley's room so they could interview him alone. One staff member reports that the police wanted to take "finger samples," presumably to search for gunpowder residues which might exist if Wesley had fired a revolver. Ortega did not mention finding any such traces on Wesley's fingers, and Thiss declined comment when asked directly about it. Attorney Brewer points out that during this period his client was heavily medicated on morphine and Demerol and was in no shape to give honest answers to an interrogation.)

And though Ortega alleges that Wesley said he wasn't struck by the cop, the county attorney had contradicted the chief of police. Three days after Ortega's press conference, Collins told reporters that Wesley said, "Patterson hit him but not with his gun...."

Ortega also claimed during the press conference that five people, again unidentified, told police they saw Wesley with a pistol before and after the first shot — the shot that alerted Detective Patterson — was heard.

New Times interviewed those people with Wesley just before he started jogging down Washington and they tell a distinctly different story.

Wesley was in a pick-up basketball game with five other men just minutes before the shooting. As often happens in this sort of game, an argument broke out, and Wesley got into it with Dwayne Jenkins and his brother Dwight.

Two of the players, Carl Kirkendoll and Raymond Scroggins, were adamant that Wesley never had a gun.

"He was wearing gym clothes, playing ball. He didn't have no gun. It's not like he could play ball with a gun or that we wouldn't notice one. And if he left a gun on the sidelines, someone steal it sure," said Kirkendoll.

"He never had a gun," said Scroggins. "Everyone knows who carries guns around here. Standley didn't have a gun that day or any other. He wasn't like that."

Jenkins claims he got into a fight with Wesley moments before the shooting, and

he and his brother both deny that Wesley had a gun. Ever. Instead they claim that Wesley struck the elder Jenkins with a sawed-off broomstick. Yet, because the police refuse to identify their witnesses, no one can ask: Did they confuse a broomstick with a weapon? In any case, Wesley's attorney says he wants to see these five witnesses, to see if they make as much sense as Vertu... who has since disappeared.

At his second press conference, on February 10, Collins once again announced that Patterson would not be prosecuted. Yet many things remain unresolved: How is it that an experienced police officer said he heard a shotgun blast but the police department now claims the initial sound was a pistol going off? Patterson said he saw Wesley — in his rearview mirror — cutting through an alley with what he thought was a sawed-off shotgun. The gun the police department claims it found along the path Wesley ran was a revolver. How did this revolver take the place of a shotgun?

Rather than deal with these problems, Collins washed his hands of the issue and mentioned that someone said they saw Wesley earlier in the day with the radical drug PCP. Although the coarsely brushed smears portray Wesley as a drug abuser who fired a gun, police tests found no traces of chemicals or gunpowder residue on the young man. He has been charged with *nada*. Nonetheless, the public is left with this fantastic image that Standley Wesley was some "crazy ghetto nigger."

And so the regulation version of the shooting, the white man's movie, aired in the newspapers and on the television screen. As the documentary unwound a

Do you think as a white cop in the projects you'd be welcomed as one of the gang, or that you'd develop an attitude just to survive?

viewpoint emerged, as frame by frame it was pounded in that Patterson was a sixteen-year veteran officer previously cited for heroism. *Here we can cut to slow motion.* "The injury to Standley Wesley," said Ortega, "was caused, at least in part, by his uncooperative behavior when confronted by Detective Patterson." *Cut to a pan of the chief:* "This was an unfortunate accident, and we are sensitive to the concerns of the community. Police officers are human, and even the most experienced can make mistakes. When we make mistakes, we must accept responsibility for them. We have done that in this incident. We have conducted as thorough an investigation as possible and appropriate action has been taken." *Cut to credits and freeze frame.* Officer suspended for ten days...

BUT THERE IS another movie playing in the Sidney P. Osborn Housing Projects. You see, the traditional media are not the official tom-toms there the way they are throughout much of the Valley. The film running in the projects is unauthorized, unedited and unyielding.

The Osborn project is a hard piece of dirt with slab and block tenements bounded by vacant lots, "jump city" bars, cheap hookers and businesses that resort to eight-foot-high chainlink fences topped with rolls of barbed wire. Residents of the area cope as best they can. And after spending a couple of weeks conducting interviews there, one begins to understand that practically no one ever

continued on page 26



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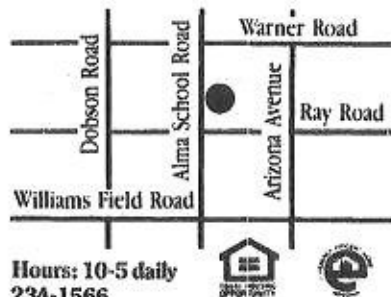
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continued from page 25

expected anything like "justice" following the shooting. Ask them what they think of the ten-day suspension of Detective Patterson and they look at you funny, like you got some kind of strange and wonderful hole in your head. The kind of hole that only white folks get.

And that look will tell you something frightening about the white man's law and the white man's order when it is applied to black man's turf. It won't tell you much, however, about Standley Wesley.

From all accounts, Wesley was making his bid to get out of the projects. According to police spokesman Thiss, the teenager had had no run-ins with the law; in fact, he was enrolled in college. While waiting for classes to begin Wesley was indulging his passion, which was hoops. Ironically, just moments before he was shot Wesley had been playing basketball in the 17th Street projects. When the bullet from the cop's gun disintegrated throughout his spinal column, Wesley was paralyzed, and simple walking, let alone soaring through the air with acrobatic Phi-Slamma-Jamma dunk shots, became a thing of the past. At once.

A few other things also happened. Wesley will never know sex in any meaningful sense of the term. Perhaps worse, he will no longer have the dignity of control over his bowel or urinary tracts. And as the muscles on his once athletic legs wither from lack of use, Wesley will have a lifetime to sit in his wheelchair, aware and observant.

Counselors warn that after such a traumatic injury there is always a period of intense anger. Wesley has not had his explosion yet and his family waits, braced for that last pathetic shoe to drop.

Others are also waiting, though their agenda may be somewhat different.

Mere hours after the operation that removed the pieces of the bullet in his body, Wesley stared at the ceiling of Good Samaritan Hospital. He was disoriented, drugged and stenciled with spine-shattered pain as he began the journey into one of man's primal nightmares — a life without legs. It was at this moment that the eighteen-year-old spotted what must have seemed like a friendly face. Another black in a wheelchair, also paralyzed from the waist down, approached Wesley's bed. The newcomer confided to the boy that his accident had happened in the Denver Broncos training camp. The two jocks traded handshakes and awkward conversation until the stranger asked Wesley who his attorney was. Better drop that lawyer and use this one, advised the former Bronco as he slipped Wesley a name.

The "former football player" actually was paralyzed when his wife shot him. Neither an ex-Bronco nor a friend to Wesley, he was a runner, an ambulance chaser for a local attorney. The shooting of Standley Wesley by Detective Ed Patterson is one of those dramas that stirs the imagination of legal sharks. The scent of big money was upon the water like the oil slick behind a super tanker that has foundered.

Chief Ortega admitted as much. The cover page of the "confidential" police report obtained by *New Times*, dated two days after the shooting, contains the following warning: "It is virtually certain that the city will be sued in this matter and we are told by the attorneys there is considerable exposure involved."

The Wesley family had already retained a lawyer they had done business

with in the past, Charles Brewer. One of those dangerous individuals who forces opponents into desperate acts, Brewer is a personal injury attorney whose ego is exceeded only by the size of the judgments he wins for clients.

In an effort to placate and reassure the family, and unaware of Brewer's involvement, the city offered to provide an inexpensive attorney and to move the injured son to a hospital in Denver.

Brewer was outraged. He told *New Times* that the city was simply trying to get hold of Standley Wesley's body so that it could more easily manipulate future proceedings (habeas corpus disappears). He pointed out that Good Samaritan is one of the top twelve spinal centers in the United States, and that the Denver outfit, Case Management, is run by former insurance firm negotiators.

"I told the city that was a ridiculous arrangement," said Brewer. "I wouldn't send my green parrot to Case Management. They are insurance company oriented. They not only manage your medical but your financial interests as well."

He also told them that they had a lawsuit on their hands in which he is asking almost \$28.9 million plus medical expenses on behalf of the family. (Phoenix is insured for \$50 million.)

And so as both movies of the shooting played, one in the black community and one in the white, the family looked to Brewer to serve as a sort of film editor, a man to splice the facts from the police department and the Sidney P. Osborn Housing Project and make a presentation to the courts in the pursuit of justice and compensation.

Meanwhile, those who live in the projects are not waiting for "justice." Those who speak say Detective Patterson was a known hardass. "He got a reputation for being a dog, for trying to show people they ain't tough." ("dogging" is jive for school-yard bully tactics.)

Wiley Nelson told *New Times* he remembered Patterson cruising through

Her face clearly registers that she is looking at a six-foot tall black man on roller skates in an outrageous hair hat who has a television camera mounted on his shoulder.

the projects in the early morning hours blasting "Macho Man" out through his car's loudspeakers.

This image of an abusive Patterson is at odds with other impressions left elsewhere by the detective. A public defender volunteered that she was sorry this mess involved Patterson, because he was one of the few cops who didn't resort to racial slurs to describe his busts. The head of the police union, Mike Petchel, described the robbery detective as a "reasonable and caring man." White people in general describe Patterson as a good egg.

More than just a stand-up guy, Patterson has been cited for his heroism. He pulled a man from a burning car only to be told, just as the vehicle was engulfed in flames, that a baby was still in the auto. After getting hosed down with a portable fire extinguisher, Patterson dashed back to the car and snatched the infant.

And there is more than "Right Stuff" going on here. The suggestion of racism is tempered when you learn that Patterson's former partner was a black — "Big John" Davis, the detective who was killed in South Phoenix last year following a bank robbery.

Not that any of this necessarily



by John Willard

unsatisfied with local coverage of the shooting, Fonz West taped responses from those who witnessed the shootings. He also helped organize protest marches and petition drives.

contradicts the image the blacks convey of Patterson. Do you think it's easy being a white cop in the projects? Do you think you'd be welcomed as one of the gang, or do you think you'd develop an attitude just to survive?

One man who isn't satisfied with the mixed images being broadcast in the wake of this shooting is Fonz West. In his own way, he has attempted to make a separate and permanent record.

"Only white [newsmen] come down here. We don't have tapes in black possession," explains Fonz West. "They got the book. They can turn the page when they're ready to turn the page. We need the tape so we can turn the page when we are ready."

Ah yes, the Fonz. At forty, Fonz West still defies categories. Part genius, part eccentric, part artist, part con, the man literally spends most of his life on roller skates. He also makes elaborate hats by weaving and braiding women's hair, and he often wears them. One other thing: he videotapes everything. Andy Warhol once predicted that technology would make everyone a star for a few minutes, and with his portable VCR camera Fonz shows that anyone can be Mike Wallace.

Within 24 hours of the shooting, Fonz West was in the projects taping eyewitnesses and recording reactions to

the tragedy. The footage, which flies in the face of Chief Ortega's findings, is a singularly incredible home movie. "This is like having the power to bring the day back to life," West told *New Times*.

A young black man flirts loudly with a passing chicana ... Hello mommasita, Hello mommasita ... then turning to the camera he says, "... I seen everything. I seen everything. I was right there. He shoved him down on the ground and shot him. He just shot him. 'Cause he wanted to kill him. He sure did. He ain't did nothing."

A young black mother steps away from her family clutching a baby bottle to her breast: "... He hit him in the back of the head and he slid down the wall and he shot him. He swooped on him. He grabbed him and started roughing him up."

A stern-faced lady steps in front of the camera and reads from the petition being circulated in the black community: "... We want criminal charges against the officer... We want the officer prosecuted... We want Officer Patterson out of the state of Arizona."

Another black in a cap and windbreaker stands nervously with his arms folded over his chest as he says to the camera, "... He hit him against the head, and when he fell he shot him."

Suddenly the monitor switches to a nighttime sequence, and in the underlit footage a barely visible eighteen-year-old Vincent Garrett explains, "... He struck him across the head a few times, as he was falling the gun went off. He had his hands up in the air and walked. He didn't turn

continued on page 28

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BLACK

continued from page 27

around or nothing. When he got shot his hands was in the air.

There is one man, a Hispanic, who comes across like a character out of Sam Shepard's pop culture. It is dark, but the lighting is better than with Garrett when this highly charged man appears upon the screen: "... I'm a minister, Jehovah Witness, I have no reason to lie. I teach people not to lie. My nickname is Freddy the Painter.

"I was sitting in my van facing right towards it when it happened, a half block away. I was close enough to see everything. This officer was banging him against the wall...."

All the while Freddy is stepping off one foot and rocking back on the next, a street corner boy that is older than Freddy. "... What is he gonna do when there is a gun behind his back? ... I seen him whop him in the back, brothers were running all over the place...." With eyes twitching and hands gesturing in punctured movements, Freddy the Painter concludes his sermon, "If they don't put him behind bars when Jehovah comes and cleans this system, he's going to be one of the first that goes. And if I see him in court and he puts his hand on the Bible, then he's a damn liar. Excuse me, I don't like to say that word, but he's a liar."

The West tapes go on like this, a combination of travelogue, street theatre and pathos. They are a record, of sorts, that is as permanent as Wesley's paralysis. On top of recording people's

memory of the grisly events, Fonz also worked on the petition drive, which was duly recorded.

One sequence opens with tight shots of the blood that dried upon the sidewalk where Wesley was shot. From there you see and hear Fonz approach the warehouse against which Wesley was shot. You hear clump-clump-clump as West walks out of the barren war zone that is the projects, and by passing through a single door you are ushered into a business office. Amidst the neat pink walls and the well-molded office partitions a white receptionist sits.

She looks up, and her face clearly registers that she is looking at a six-foot-tall black man on roller skates who is wearing an outrageous hair hat and who has a television camera mounted upon his shoulder.

"Happy New Year," says Fonz. "Can I see the person in charge?"

"Who are you with?" asks the receptionist.

"The NAACP," responds Fonz without missing a beat, and she quickly arches an eyebrow as she rises from her seat to get the manager. A short, middle-aged white man cautiously approaches Fonz, and he is all but carrying a sign which reads, "Who is this guy ... not Jesse Jackson, not Ed Bradley ... Who is this guy?"

Fonz asks the man to sign the petition, but the manager says he was in a meeting when the shooting occurred and he doesn't care to sign anything. But Fonz shows grit.

"If you approve of police shooting people, well, that might spark a riot and

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there may not be a place for you to work then," Fonz says. "These people burn the building down and you don't have a job. You don't approve of police shooting people down?"

In a wildly different tone of voice, the manager says quickly, "Oh, no, nobody proves of that." And then the poor cop grabs his head with his hand and continues to clutch his scalp in pain for the remainder of Fonz' visit. He stares at the petition for a very long time and then signs it. Then Fonz asks if the people could put a painting on an outside wall of the business. He envisions a drawing of a police officer in sunglasses, his pistol — just fired — in one hand and a blind man's cane in the other.

Even middle-aged white men can only

be mau-maued so far. He demurs.

"You sure?" asks Fonz. "It's all about art."

Fonz also taped his own later run-in with the police. It is never clear why the patrolmen, two black and one white, are

Any black who is qualified for the police force can do very well for himself in private industry without having to risk his life.

concerned with Fonz. He is back in the projects filming the aftermath of the shooting when the heat comes down. Repeatedly he is warned to leave but resists. Seemingly, he resists forever. The police threaten to arrest him and seize the filming equipment, though they never do. Eventually Fonz is driven to his business and told not to return to the projects. Though they threaten much, and though

Fonz responds with a lot of mouth, he is only given a ticket. For trespassing, Fonz may be the only man in Phoenix ticketed for trespassing in the housing projects.

The hassle is instructive. The black sergeant in charge of this action shows admirable restraint in dealing with another black man. He is not threatened by Fonz' mouth or attitude. There is no macho response by the cop. Is it that Fonz is filming the event? Or is it because the two men are black...?

This is a critical point raised by the black community spokespeople. They want white cops in the projects replaced by minority officers — which is only common sense. Until this happens, every confrontation will have the issue of race seething beneath the surface.

Spokesman Thiss points out that the

police recruit minorities, but the force is at a disadvantage. Any black who is qualified to make it on the police force, says Thiss, can do very well for himself in private industry without having to work weekends or third shift, and without having to risk his life.

"Them guys get over here [the projects] and they get burned out, and they start doing all that shit," a black cop comments later. "That's what's really wrong. They should really pick the guys they send over here to work, but they don't do that. They just send anybody that will come." □



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