



PHOTO: KELLY BRACKEN

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PROPAGANDA AND PROTESTS

The public believes that TASERs kill, and something must be done to change their minds.

YOU RECEIVED AN INVITATION LAST MONTH. I was supposed to forward it on to you. But I took the liberty of deciding that it wasn't the kind of party that you would have enjoyed attending.

The invite came from a Chicago-based PR firm. They wanted me to pass on to you their desire for you to attend a "Non-Violent March Against Recent Police Violence." I guess they mistook the name of this magazine for "F... the Police."

But I digress. The subject of this editorial is not the anti-cop toxic waste that flows into my mailbox. It's the effect that all of this anti-cop toxic waste has on the average citizen when it appears in mainstream publications.

You see, media coverage of officer-involved shootings and suspect deaths have a great resonance with the public. Consider the police operations in Chicago that spurred the aforementioned protest rally.

In one incident, Chicago officers shot and killed an 18-year-old African-American man whom they say flashed a gun at them. The community, with the help of professional protestors the Rev. Jesse Jackson and the Rev. Al Sharpton, decried the shooting because the young man was hit in the back. At presstime, the case was under investigation.

The other incident that triggered the Chicago protest is even more problematic for local officers because it could deprive them of one of the most effective tools available to law enforcement officers, the TASER.

During the first week of August, Chicago's finest were called to a home by a distraught woman who reportedly informed them that her brother—a man who reportedly had been arrested dozens of times and was violating a restraining order—was damaging the property. Official reports say the man resisted attempts to bring him under control, and the officers shot him twice with a TASER and gave him a dose of OC. He died.

Now, I don't want to diminish the tragedy of what happened to this family. But they are now all over the Chicago papers attacking the officers for using a TASER on their loved one. Which is very dangerous because the Chicago PD is skittish about TASER use anyway.

Chicago bureaucrats, like many public citizens, believe that TASERs are lethal weapons, and incidents like this fanned by press coverage of protests by Sharpton and his ilk are likely to reinforce that myth. Which could result in Chicago taking TASERs away from its officers.

The autopsy was not released at presstime. But if it's honest and not influenced by politics, then it will most likely conclude that this man OD'ed on cocaine, and he would have died if the Chicago police had responded to his resisting arrest by hitting him with Nerf balls.

Almost every "TASER death" has involved a cocaine overdose. But that's never the headline in the press coverage of these events. The headline always reads like the Aug. 5 headline in the Chicago Tribune: "Man Dies After Police Use TASERs During Arrest."

Headlines like this have convinced the public that TASERs kill. The irony here is that TASERs have saved a lot of lives, both police lives and the lives of people who might have been killed by police if they hadn't been TASERed.

Demonizing such a beneficial tool is clearly part of the agenda of activists. And unfortunately their propaganda has convinced a lot of the public that TASERs are deadly.

Perhaps the only way to counter this propaganda is through citizen education. Unfortunately, unless you can convince the press to publish or broadcast a story praising the TASER as a life-saving device, then citizen education is going to be an uphill battle.

Still, that's a battle you must fight. Because the goal of your detractors is to deprive you of one of your most effective and benign weapons. Such a misguided decision could be deadly for you and the people you serve. ☯

★ **ALMOST EVERY "TASER DEATH" HAS INVOLVED A COCAINE OVERDOSE. BUT THAT'S NEVER THE HEADLINE.**