

His Life Mattered THEN and it Matters NOW, Carnell Russ

As the nation was rudely awakened by the death of George Floyd, I was forced to reflect on the untimely death of my brother Carnell Russ. Like George, Carnell lost his life upon an encounter with law enforcement. It's a time in my life – my family's life – that changed the course of life for each of us. Singly. Collectively.

THEN

At the time of his demise, 24-year-old Carnell was a Son, Brother, Nephew, Grandson, Uncle and a Husband. The loss hit many, it hit hard, and it hit *home*. Carnell grew up in Star City, Arkansas as the ninth child of ten children born to Turner & Aggie Russ. On Memorial Day, May 31, 1971, Carnell, his wife, a cousin and 6 of their 9 children were traveling home from Benton, Arkansas when stopped by an Arkansas State Trooper in Yorktown, Arkansas for allegedly speeding (75 in a 60). Keep in mind that its 1971 – not far removed from the Civil Rights Era. This stop resulted in the death of my brother over a speeding ticket with a fine of \$23. Observe the correlation between Carnell's and George's unjust deaths.

The attempted exchange of money.

Police encounter.

Death of a black, unarmed person.

Regarding Carnell's encounter with the police, below is an excerpt of [the writing that can be found in the Central Arkansas Library Systems Arkansas Encyclopedia](#).

Officers Charles Lee Ratliff and Norman Draper met him at the jail. Ratliff had recently arrived from Shannon, Mississippi, and had been on the job for just four months. Draper was preparing to begin his job as a city police officer the following day. At the jail, Russ was advised that his required bond was \$23. He asked if he could be released on his own recognizance, since his father knew **Lincoln County** sheriff Billy Bert French. Ratliff unsuccessfully attempted to contact French. Russ was unable to reach his father. Ratliff told Russ that he could not leave without posting bond. Russ asked if he could pay by check. Ratliff said he needed cash. Russ then went out to the car, and Clementine gave him the bond money.

Back inside, Russ asked if he could have a copy of the speeding ticket. Green told him that the ticket would be retained for the local court. Russ insisted that he would not hand over the bond money until he had a copy of the ticket, which he was entitled to under state law. Ratliff told Russ that he was going to lock him up for refusing to pay. He placed his hand on Russ's left elbow. Russ drew back and assumed a fighting posture.

Exactly what happened next drew different accounts from the survivors. According to Ratliff, he exchanged a number of blows with Russ before hitting Russ in the head with his gun. The gun discharged in the process, shooting Russ in the forehead. Draper told a similar story, though he claimed it was all over in "a very few seconds." State trooper Green testified that "no licks" had been exchanged and that Ratliff had extended his arm and shot Russ in the head. Russ was rushed by ambulance to University Hospital in **Little Rock (Pulaski County)**, where he was pronounced dead at 2:20 a.m.

Here you can read an updated [full article of the incident](#) published in Arkansas Times. I would love to share a picture of my brother when he was alive even if were only a mugshot. There is no mugshot as Carnell was not arrested for this encounter nor arrested for any other matter EVER in his life. He walked into the police station that day to pay a \$23 speeding ticket. He never walked out.

NOW

Very little has changed since 1971, thus the recent global unrest is understood. When does it stop? When will ALL LIVES MATTER? It has to be *after* BLACK LIVES MATTER. It simply has to be.

The George Floyd peaceful and unpeaceful protests have made a grand impact. Protests of any kind will not prevent additional killings of black unarmed men and women by law enforcement though. Change comes in layers and the protests were a visual layer. All the layers will not be as visible, but they have to be actioned. All have to vote on local and national elections. All have to be held accountable as a race, as a community and individually. This warrants UNITY! There are discussions to be had in homes, in businesses, schools/organizations, state offices, national offices. Laws need to be reviewed and revised as well as new laws need to be written/passed that are fair and applied equally.

What happened to Carnell is history. Not just Arkansas history or black history. Its part of law history, US history. History repeating itself over and over, and over, and over again. History that is part of *my* life's story. A part of my life that I wish I did not have to think about or share. I do though. I share it not to shame any law enforcement agency but to initiate community involvement, race relation and race education as I too have black sons, grandsons, nephews, black nieces, aunts, uncles and loved ones that can easily become a part of this tragic reporting of black lives lost upon engagement with law enforcement. Unity by way of connecting, communicating, embracing differences and celebrating is a layer that anyone can partake in – the opportunity to be a part of the positive change is an option for you now!

I started a nonprofit organization in honor of my brother, The [Carnell Russ Foundation](#). There is room and a role for all in the process of uniting to intervene and then prevent people from having to share a story similar to mine and my brother - I still say his name, Carnell Russ.