

Sterling, Castile, and Trump

by [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

July 6, 2016

I was traveling yesterday, and so I'm catching up on the last two days of news.

- A police officer shot [Alton Sterling](#) in Louisiana. He sold CDs. One police officer held him down, on the ground, on his back, while the other officer shot him.
- In Minnesota, a police officer shot [Philando Castile](#) after pulling him over for a traffic violation.
- In Ohio, an angry Donald Trump responds after he tweeted an anti-Semitic image of Hillary Clinton from a white supremacist group. [He blasts the media](#) for their criticism of the image: **“They’re racial profiling, they’re profiling. Not us.”**

How is this even possible? Two black men are killed by police. Brutally and violently. And a billionaire white man, with every privilege in the world, says *he’s the victim*.

Of course, racial profiling refers to **the practice of law enforcement officials targeting individuals for suspicion of a crime based on race, ethnicity, religion or national origin**. This sort of brutal systemic racism has been endemic throughout our history. Now, we have camera phones, so we can’t ignore it. The horrific images pulse through our social media news feeds, along with vacation selfies and baby pictures.

As Christians, we need to remember how systems of oppression work, so we can avoid them and speak out against them. With Trump’s claims, we’re struggling with an intersection of race, gender, and religion. Our thoughts can become entangled with sound bites and memes, so it’s good to go back to the basics.

“They’re profiling us.”

Trump's claim goes along with declarations of reverse racism or racism against whites. The claims are hollow because racism is systemic. In our society, racism is broad, deep and profound. It touches every area of life--from prenatal care, to neighborhood subsidies, to educational investments, to borrowing costs, to police protection. The list is endless. But just to scratch the surface, white people have better access to health care, more government investment for their neighborhoods, more money in their education, lower borrowing costs, and better police protections.

Trump enjoys all the money, education, subsidies, and protections that this country offers. The media simply held him accountable because he ripped off an ad from a white supremacist group. So why does his "they're profiling us" red-faced whining hit a chord?

In our news, we're talking about the systems that uphold white men, to the detriment of others. To be clear, I'm not against white men; I'm against the oppressive system. There's a big difference.

Oppressive systems work through domination (positions of authority are reserved for white men), identification (ideas of what is preferred or normal are associated with white men), and centeredness (our focus remains on white men and boys and what they do). When the system begins to break down or begins to be exposed, then those in power feel like they are the victims.

When a black man is President of the United States and a white woman might be the next one, then system of white male domination becomes threatened. Trump stokes that sense of victimhood in his rallies as he talks about building walls, the threats of immigration, and "Making America Great Again." All of this hits a nerve, because it calls upon the power of nostalgia to promise a system where white men will dominate again.

When guns are a right for white men, but black men get shot for carrying, that is because the system of white male domination has been threatened. The system's backlash becomes brutal.

We also need to take note that Trump does not say, "They're profiling me." He includes the whole rally in on the victimization. The idea that the media is profiling "us" allows everyone there to be a part of identifying themselves with the white male power. It centers Trump in the story, pulling the focus away from the history of

horrifying anti-Semitism that the Jewish people have suffered.

As Christians, we do not get our identity from Rome. We resist Empire. We are called to be in solidarity with the oppressed, crushed and crucified. And so it is, over 2,000 years later. We are still called to be liberated from these brutal systems that uphold violence.