

Testimony of Lucia McBath
Hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil
Rights and Human Rights
on
“Stand Your Ground’ Laws: Civil Rights and Public Safety Implications of the Expanded Use of
Deadly Force”
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My name is Lucia Holman McBath and I thank you for the opportunity to speak before this great institution today. I was raised in a family steeped in justice and confident in the triumphant goodness of humanity. My mother was a registered nurse and my father, who served in the U.S. Army Dental Corp., was also for over twenty years president of the NAACP for the State of Illinois. He worked actively with President Lyndon Baines Johnson in the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. If he could see me today, testifying in front of the United States Senate, he would be beaming with pride and amazed at how far his daughter had come. Until he came to understand what brought me here.

I appear before you because my son Jordan was shot and killed last November while sitting in the back seat of a friend’s car listening to loud music. The man who killed him opened fire on four unarmed teenagers even as they tried to move out of harm’s way. That man was empowered by the Stand Your Ground statute. I am here to tell you there was no ground to stand. There was no threat. No one was trying to invade his home, his vehicle, nor threatened him or his family. There was a vociferous argument about music, during which the accused, Michael Dunn, did not feel he was treated with respect. “You’re not going to talk to me like that,” he shouted as he sprayed the car that Jordan sat in with bullets, killing him instantly. When Jordan’s friends tried to back the car away, Mr. Dunn aimed his handgun and fired off several more rounds; nine, total, pierced the car. There are any number of ways this interaction might have gone, but there was only one way it could have ended once a gun entered the equation.

In Florida, over one million people carry concealed weapons. Additionally, ten to fifteen thousand more Floridians are approved to carry guns in public every month- faster than any State in the nation. Nationally, Florida has some of the loosest permitting requirements. Automobile glove boxes are becoming modern day “gun boxes.” In his glove box, Michael Dunn kept a 9mm semi-automatic along with two loaded magazines. Once he had unloaded his gun at my son and his teen-aged friends, he immediately went back to his hotel, ordered a pizza and slept. He left the scene and made no attempt to call police. He retreated, but only after he killed my son. The next morning he was arrested two hours away. Those are hardly the actions and motives of someone who was quaking with fear.

Some will tell you that the argument was about music, but I believe that it was about the availability of guns and the eagerness to hate. People like Mr. Dunn feel empowered to use their gun instead of their voice to reason with others. Now I face the very real possibility that my son's killer will walk free, hiding behind a statute that lets people claim a threat where there was none. This law declares open season on anyone that we don't trust for reasons that don't even have to be true. In essence, it allows any armed citizen to "self-deputize" themselves and establish their own definition of law and order. It lets one and all define their own criteria for right and wrong and how justice will be carried out. Even the Wild West had more stringent laws governing the taking of life than we have now. "Stand Your Ground" defies all reason. It goes against the sound system of justice established long ago on this very Hill.

My son was named for the river Jordan. In the Bible, that river symbolized the crossing to freedom. Its waters marked the final steps to liberation and offered up the holy stream that baptized Jesus. Its name seemed a fitting choice for a boy born at the end of the twentieth century- a time when black people in this country had finally come into their own.

Jordan was named for a change in the tide, a decision to try harder and do better. He was my only child. He was raised with love and learning and a clear understanding of right and wrong. I have been without Jordan now since Thanksgiving weekend 2012, without him last Christmas and on his birthday in February. I never got to take his prom picture or see him graduate from high school. I can tell you all about him- about his easy smile, his first girlfriend, and his plans to join the Marines. I can tell you how he loved his dad's gumbo. And, how they both rooted for the NY Giants. But you can never really know my boy. Because an angry man owned a gun, kept it close at hand, and chose to demonstrate unbridled hatred one balmy evening for reasons I will never understand. These laws empowered his prejudiced beliefs and subsequent rage over my son's own life, his liberty and pursuit of happiness. There will be no sense made of any of it, unless I and the families of other victims speak out to assure this kind of predatory violence ends.

It was fifty years ago that my father shook hands with Eleanor Roosevelt. She assured him of the validity of his struggle and the promise of better times. She, as he did, believed that this nation was righteous to the core. That we as a country would never stop striving to do better. And that was what made us better. Honorable men and women of the Senate, you can prove them right today. With your help and willingness to bring our laws back toward the true tenets of justice, you can lift this nation from its internal battle in which guns rule over right. You have the power to restore hope to a nation crying out for justice. Thank you.