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July 8, 2016: lack Lives Matter So Much that the Police are Needed

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Title: Black Lives Matter So Much that Police are Needed

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7/8/2016—this morning brings news of six killings yesterday—two civilians in police shootings in two cities and four fatal shootings of police officers in Dallas, with more officers wounded. It is a horrific reminder of the violence and race issues at the heart of America. But I want to tell a different story. Last month, there was a shooting at a basketball court in the afternoon in a park near my house. At the time, children, overwhelmingly African-American, were practicing for youth football and cheer leading. One girl was wounded. Rather than cancel these youth activities, organizers asked members of the nearby community to show up at the first practice held after the shooting and asked for increased police presence. So, there we all were—mostly older white neighbors, city officials, and several officers—watching kids practicing under the watchful eyes of older black men and women who were doing coaching it looked like they had been doing for years. It was an inspiring sight. That night, there was no question of tensions between the police and the community. The police were there to help hold off the forces of drugs and gangs and guns that were one possible alternative for the hundreds of young black children playing in the bright sunlight. That night another alternative seemed possible, one symbolized by the positive organization of youth sports. That night, my neighborhood, which generally practices social racial segregation amidst its physical integration, was united with hope for these kids and a determination that they not be claimed by the streets. It was also a reminder of what the true threat is to black lives in America. The unfortunate police shootings must be investigated and, finally, wrongful shootings must be punished, which they rarely are. But those are tiny exceptions. Tuesday night, the police officers, black and white, were there to help. And they wanted nothing for those children but a full and healthy life. The real threat had come from the casual violence on the basketball court weeks before. There was the threat that might one day kill and cripple many of these kids.