

# SPECIAL EDITION

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# Guns: Ongoing crisis

**Bleu Bell**  
Managing Editor

It's only two months into the new decade and Tallahassee has already seen five shootings, one of which was fatal. As gun violence continues to become a growing concern, residents and officials alike are relying on each other for a solution.

Last year, according to data collected by the Tallahassee Democrat, 19 of the 73 reported shootings in Leon County were fatal and 54 people were injured. Although

the shootings were not unique to one side of town, there were hotbeds for gun violence in the Northwest region of Tallahassee and on the south side corridor that includes East Magnolia Drive and South Adams Street.

"The shootings happen over a large part of town. A lot of the times when we get an uncooperative victim at the hospital we don't know where it occurred," said

Tallahassee Police Department Public Information Officer Kevin Bradshaw. "Our shootings in Tallahassee generally revolve around the criminal drug trade."

While none of the fatal shootings in Tallahassee last year were suicides, an average of 1,626 people in Florida die by gun suicide every year. According to data collected by Everytown for Gun Safety, Florida has the 26th highest rate of gun deaths in the Unit-

ed States, with 63% of them being suicides and 35% being homicides.

According to Officer Bradshaw, victims that show up at the hospital are frequently uncooperative. TPD is focused on building rapport with the community and relying on witnesses and residents feeling comfortable reporting these incidents.

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# Lawmakers come up short

**Audriana Thomas**  
Staff writer

Democratic lawmakers in South Florida are pushing for an Urban Core Gun Violence task force. Two bills aimed at reducing Florida's gun violence issues are currently working through the Legislature, which will conclude its 2020 session in a little more than a week.

The proposal would create a 10 member task force that would investigate system failures and the causes of high crime rates within urban areas. Sen. Jason Pizzo (D- Miami-Dade) believes that with the increasing disproportionate deaths of minorities across the nation action needs to be taken.

"It's the worst-kept secret in the Senate that the main reason why I am here is to protect the lives of Black and Brown," Pizzo said.

Pizzo, a former assistant state attorney in Miami, wants to use the task force to create new ideas to aid in reducing the homicide rates in areas like Tampa, Jacksonville and Miami.

In the past urban core communities have tried implementing curfews, keeping children in the house in order to avoid more fatal incidents. Miami-Dade police department has a curfew for children under 17 from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. Monday through Friday. However, the violence has not ceased.

Pizzo said, "A curfew is not the way to raise a child."

The program cost is estimated at between \$350,000 and \$415,000. Pizzo believes that the program may actually cost less but also says the price is nothing compared to the lives it may save.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2018 report, there were 1,315 homicides in the state of Florida. Several lawmakers believe a large portion of these deaths occurred in South Florida.

The bill has a similar counterpart in the House being spearheaded by Rep. Shervin Jones (D- West Park).

The legislative measure differs slightly by indicating who would sit on the com-



Guns and bullets

Photo courtesy of Google Images

mittee. Stipulating that at least two members appointed by each of the following: the president of the Senate, the minority leader of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, the House minority leader and the Governor.

Both measures follow in the footsteps of a prevention task force previously formed following the February 2018 shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School, which Jones sat on.

Jones reiterated that the purpose of this legislation is not to get rid of guns, saying, "We really need there be substance behind what comes out of the task force.

With a sunset on the task force just to look at it and bring those recommendations to the Legislature of those things that need to be changed."

While similar task forces have been formed in other areas experiencing similar issue, the effectiveness of such task forces has not been proven. In Oakland, Calif., a similar task force was formed, which helped to prolong a record six-year reduction in crime. However, in 2019 the area experienced a seven percent increase in crime. This led to some questioning the effectiveness of the violence reduction strategies produced by the task force.

Jones' measure appears as if it will not make it to the House floor. With less than two weeks left in the legislative session the bill still has to be heard by two more committees.

Pizzo's piece still needs to go through the Senate Appropriation Committee, which does not have any more meetings scheduled for the regular session. However, the Appropriation Committee can schedule a meeting between now and March 13 when the session is scheduled to end.



# Thomas moves beyond a gun-filled childhood

**Ariyon Dailey**  
Editor-in-Chief

Bernard Thomas III was introduced to guns as a young child and learned early on that they're meant to protect people. But little did Thomas know that he was being raised in an uneasy, gun concentrated environment.

"It don't matter where you live, if somebody wants to shoot — they're going to shoot," Thomas said.

Thomas is 6-foot-4 and stands as tall as his bedroom doorway. His room has a theme of blue by his lights, curtains, bed comforter, a blue basketball jersey and blue tennis rackets hanging on his wall.

He said that blue is good for the brain and makes him feel safe. Clearly, it's also his favorite color.

He sat on the edge of his bed relaxed, but so jumpy that he constantly changed his sitting position.

"I have ADHD," he said smiling.

Thomas is a junior social work student from Jacksonville. He came to Florida A&M University on a tennis scholarship but he's also very skilled in basketball and plays for an intramural team in Tallahassee.

Before attending FAMU, Thomas strictly focused on sports as it became a distraction from the street violence that heavily centered guns. He enjoys the competition of sports and was committed to using his athletic abilities to gain an education.

"So for me, whatever got me out of Jacksonville was what was gonna work for me. And it just so happened that tennis did," Thomas said.

In Jacksonville, 78 percent of homicides involved gun violence in 2019, according to News 4 Jax.

There was a gun death that deeply affected Thomas, but he chose to not speak on it.

Thomas says that almost everyone in his neighborhood has a gun because the possibility of getting hurt is unpredictable.

"If you live in Duval County, you know that a bullet don't have a name on it. You can be in the mist of everything — crazy stuff," Thomas said.

Thomas recalled a man from his neighborhood who sleeps in a car with multiple guns and how guns would be fired on any occasion.

"My junior and senior year, at a football game, there were gunshots let off at the football game — somebody got shot at the football game," he said.

Thomas explained how the unpredictability of his environment revealed to him that guns can still cause problems due to jealousy. He feels that people are always going to want what you have.

But Thomas knows firsthand that everyone isn't given a choice about the kind of environment or situations they're put in.

"Some people are being labeled as a gang member just by the way that they look and where they're from. Why put that label on someone who has never committed a real crime," he said.

He sympathizes with some people according to their situation and stereotypes.

"You can't help that you're born into poverty. And even if they did commit a crime, was it a crime of need? None of that goes into consideration," Thomas added.

But now, Thomas is preparing to attend

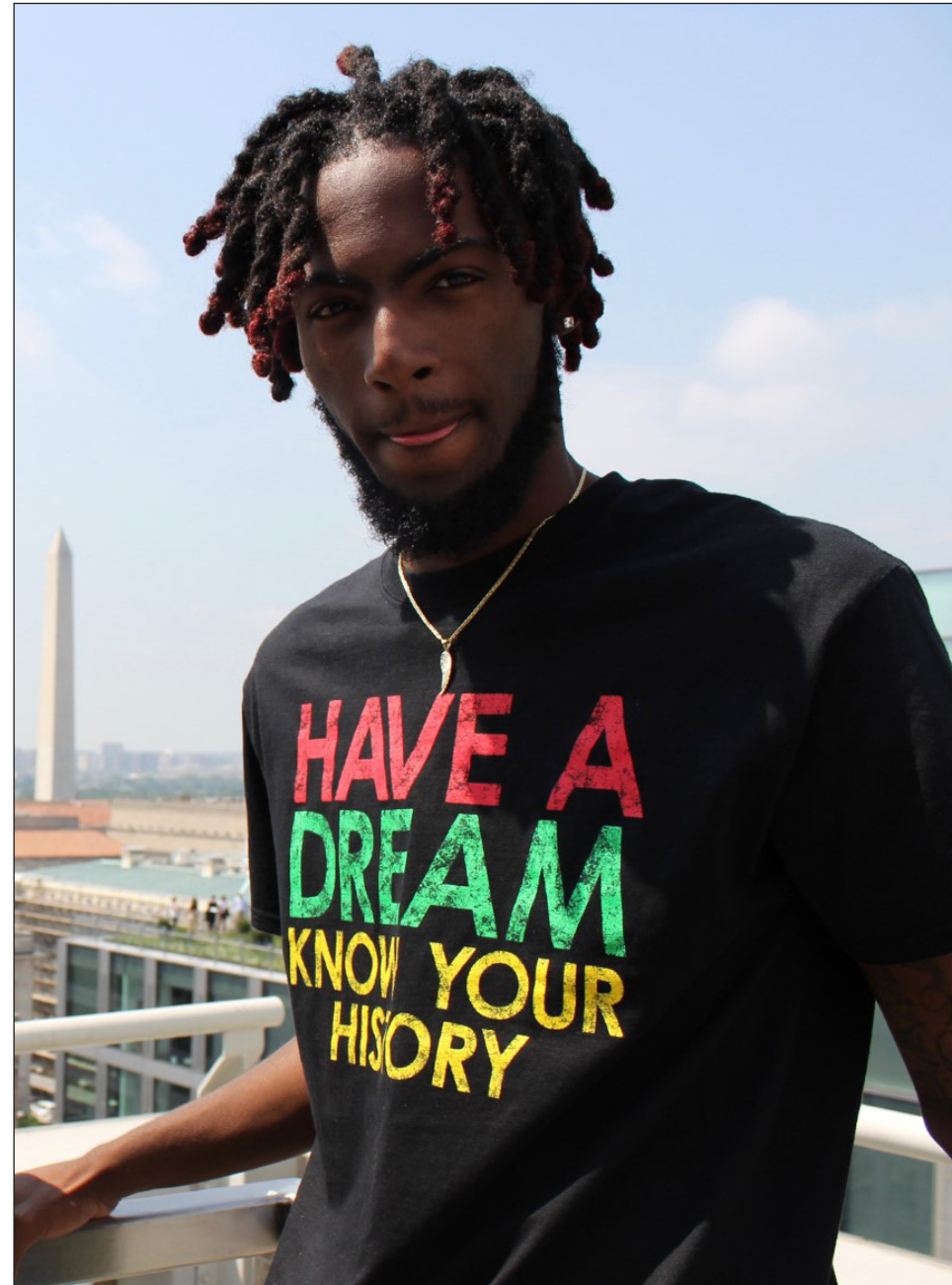


Photo courtesy of Amy Donofrio

**GUN VIOLENCE**, continued from page 3

the Alumni of Color Conference at Harvard University this weekend. An accomplishment he can't stop beaming about.

"Nobody did this, you feel me? That I know," he said.

Thomas will be participating in a poster fair to discuss his non-profit at the conference. It's for people who are trying to transform their communities.

Thomas focuses on juvenile justice. He has put effort into working with Ferguson leaders and Duval County attorneys and public officials in his hometown of Jacksonville.

Juvenile justice sparked his interest a few years ago, when one of his classmates was almost given 10 years in prison for accessory to armed robbery, despite it being his first offense and the fact that he was nearly 17 years old.

He says it was a shocking and scary moment for him and his classmates. So Thomas wanted to do something about it.

"Me and a lot of my peers actually listened to ourselves about something," he said.

He said they still feel uncomfortable talking to police, but he's willing to put his pride aside and do it for the betterment of his community.

His late grandmother, someone who made a big impact on his life, saw Thomas' passion and mindset to make it out of Jacksonville early on.

"She saw my heart and work ethic. I didn't really like drama— I didn't like conflict yet. I still had to go through it, I still had to persevere. She saw that I wanted to get out of it and stayed on me," he said.

Thomas has a tight-knit circle of friends who know him as "Nard." One of his closest friends and cousin, Xavier Spearman, describes Thomas as a great friend.

Spearman joked about Thomas' character quite a bit, but he said, "He's willing to give his last for other people and puts himself on the line for other



Bernard Thomas III.

Photo courtesy of Amy Donofrio

people."

Thomas credits his tennis coach, "Coach Mark," who is like a second father to him for his current path with tennis and social work.

Thomas also thanks Amy Donofrio, a former teacher of his who helped him come out of his shell and is dedicated to juvenile justice and children.

Thomas also talked about his younger sister Amaiya Thomas, who now admires him. The two were able to grow closer after Amaiya wrote him a heartfelt letter about how proud she was of him and his hard work.

"I thought she hated me. I used to feel

like I was letting her down! But when I got to college it just changed. She was applying for a scholarship and wrote a full page about how I was her role model," he said.

Thomas couldn't put his ultimate goal into words, but he wishes to achieve freedom of expression.

"A lot of people can't express themselves freely. They get labeled for expressing themselves. For standing up for yourself. So yeah, expression," he said.

Thomas smiled widely and proudly showed off a Tupac graphic tee and a hoodie that read, "I AM NOT A GANG MEMBER."

The hoodie represents the organization "EVAC" which focuses on youth concerns and solutions to combat racism, police brutality and the justice system.

Thomas is currently working on creating his own non-profit for his juvenile justice efforts and has been working with other non-profit organizations.

Thomas may have grown up in a place where bullets are unpredictable, but he's certain to create change for his hometown of Jacksonville and youth everywhere.



# Our fallen Rattler: Jamee Johnson

Aiyana Ishmael & Mia Uzzell

Staff Reporter & Assistant Opinions Editor

Friends and family of Jamee Johnson want the world to know him as reserved, kind-hearted, and most of all a man of his word.

On the night of Dec. 14, the four shots that were fired on East 20th Street at Buckman Street in Jacksonville, Florida claimed the life of the Jamee they remember. In the blink of an eye, the 22-year-old senior Business Administration student became a state-wide headline.

The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office (JSO) confirmed Johnson as a subject of a traffic stop conducted by Officers Graham and J. Gariga at 5:11 p.m.

Although the reason for the arrest has yet to be released, JSO says Gariga attempted to escort Johnson for arrest and after a struggle ensued, Johnson returned to his car and accelerated the gas. JSO said when Johnson reportedly reached for his handgun, Gariga fired his service weapon four times.

After performing CPR, the responding officers pronounced Johnson dead at the scene. JSO has denied Johnson's family the chance to view bodycam footage in the fatal officer-involved shooting as Gariga's camera was allegedly dislodged during the altercation.

According to the Proceedings of the National Academies of Sciences, over the course of a lifetime, Black men face a one in 1,000 risks of being killed during an encounter with police, a rate much higher than that of white men.

Unfortunately for Jamee Johnson, he became the one. His life was reduced to a statistic, but that isn't what his friends and family want him to be remembered for.

Ty Cromer, who was close friends with Johnson, recalls all the times Johnson was there for him and his friend group. They spent many days and nights making memories in the halls of FAMU Village.

"I remember our sophomore year we moved into the same community and he was the only one who brought up his car," Cromer said. "Anytime I needed a ride or needed to go somewhere Jamee was

always right there for me. It's just hard to believe that his life was taken away, like it still doesn't feel real."

Cromer is glad that through everything, Jamee Johnson always stood up for himself. No matter his height he made sure to never let anyone diminish him.

"He would never back down from anything," Cromer said. "The more challenges you put in front of him the more he'll take it on. He was the smallest one, but he had the biggest heart."

Family, friends, and fellow Rattlers hate the image the Jacksonville Police Department wrongfully painted of Johnson. They know who he was as a person and hope others will realize that too.

Russell Colburn, a reporter at Actions News Jax tweeted about the incident. Colburn's tweets put Johnson as the sole aggressor, which created a social media outrage from the rattler community.

Many students began replying to Colburn's tweet saying that his live-coverage didn't show the full story.

Jabari Prier, a recent FAMU graduate, wants to shift the narrative in the media to truly highlight the essence of Jamee's character. Prier was a member of the 20th class of the FAMU chapter of Progressive Black Men Inc. with Johnson and wants to memorialize Jamee for the benevolent spirit he was.

"Jamee was a college student; Jamee was going to finish from the school of Business; Jamee was active in the community throughout our organization," said Prier when asked what the headlines should say about Johnson. "He's a standup guy. It is really frustrating that anyone could even formulate something out of their mouth about him looking like a suspect or doing anything wrong, because he didn't."

Most of all, Prier believes that Johnson's passing is a glaring indicator of how no one, regardless of an exemplary character, socioeconomic status, or friend group, is exempt from gun violence. He says the stereotype surrounding victims of police brutality as "thugs" doesn't fit



Photo courtesy of Jamee Johnson's family.

Jamee Johnson is remembered as kind-hearted and driven.

Jamee in the slightest as he did not have a criminal record and was "definitely never a troublemaker."

For those who knew Jamee, having something seen so often on television attack one of your own is incomprehensible, but many believe Johnson's passing sent a reverberating echo on the brevity of life throughout the university.

The local Tallahassee community has rallied together for vigils at the eternal flame, protests at The Capitol, and community advocacy events in hopes to seek justice for Johnson and demand the release of the incident's body camera footage.

The overwhelming support drew the attention of nationally acclaimed Attorneys Benjamin Crump and S. Lee Merritt who took on the high-profile cases of Trayvon Martin and Botham Jean, respectively. Both Crump and Merritt have joined forces to tackle Johnson's case.

Devan Vilfrard, the Interim President of the FAMU NAACP chapter, says the outpour of communal support surrounding this tragedy stems from how state-wide gun violence is closing in locally.

Gun violence sent Florida into shock

with the death of Trayvon Martin in 2012. Later that year, the state made national headlines again as gun violence claimed the life of Jordan Davis.

Soon after, FAMU experienced gun violence locally in 2016 when Quinton Langford, affectionately known as "White Boy Q", was gunned down during homecoming festivities. To Vilfrard, Johnson's death is another reminder of how gun violence continues to hit closer and closer to home.

"These things have happened a lot in Florida, so to see it happen again to a rattler is a little jarring," Vilfrard said.

However, he believes for justice to be brought to the family of Jamee, rattlers must collectively continue to support the fight. Vilfrard says the university erupted in protest that, unfortunately, was short-lived.

"We can't just feel sad and then not do anything about it," Vilfrard said. "Within the first week, there was a lot of social media activism. To actually say, 'let's have a weekly or monthly town hall to see updates on what's happening with our fallen rattler' is needed."

The FAMU<sup>AN</sup>

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# Trayvon Martin's legacy motivates Black youth

## Sierra Lyons

## Opinions Editor

To be Black in America is to live in two worlds at once.

In one world you're told if you work hard and do the right thing, you can grow up and have anything you want. In another world you witness that dream being snatched out of the hands of Black children, men and women. The is the world Trayvon Martin lived in on Feb. 26, 2012, where in the blink of an eye a dream became a nightmare.

Never before on a national level had I witnessed such a heinous atrocity transpire to a young, Black boy. For many Black children growing up in America, this tragedy provoked doubt in the legitimacy of the value of "justice" we are often taught to believe is a right every American citizen is entitled to. To add to our already wavering faith in our justice system, the not-guilty verdict delivered to the murderer, who deservedly will remain unnamed, completely woke up a young generation to the reality of being Black in America.

Prior to the murder of Trayvon, it was only through very limited history lessons that most Black youth learned how white supremacy had robbed individuals of the right to dream. Through learning about the assassination of historical figures like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the brutal lynching of 14-year-old Emmett Till, young "millennials" and "zoomers" were given a meager inside look into the dark history of our nation.

With the death of Trayvon and the trial, constant news coverage and dialogue on social media allowed young Americans to voice the anguish they were feeling, living through this tragedy unfolding in real time. The injustice left our generation with two options: Press on or remain silent.

For Jabari Capers, a graduating engineering student at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, the option to press on was more like a necessity than a choice. Capers is Martin's cousin, although more like brothers having spent many of their summer days playing Call of Duty and football under their grandmother's roof.

"Really until the shooting happened that's when I was like, 'OK wait, so a lot of things



Photo courtesy of MSNBC.

Phillip Agnew and young college students from all over Florida travel to Washington D.C to rally in support of Trayvon Martin.

don't make sense anymore," Capers said. "Like things already didn't make quite a lot of sense but after that I was like OK ..."

Much like Capers, a lot of young, Black Americans were trying to process their confusion, with what we believed was an obvious abuse of power. A racial divide among us and our peers truly broke out when many White youth were blind to the racial aspect of the case, meanwhile Black youth saw the situation for what it really was.

The Pew Research Center conducted a study in 2013 on the racial divide of the verdict of the case. Fifty-two percent of White individuals ages 18-29 believed that the issue of race was getting too much attention in the case. Meanwhile 78 percent of Black individuals believed that race was an important issue that needed to be discussed in the case.

Since the death of Trayvon Martin, Black individuals have worked hard to ensure that his killing was not in vain. Dr. King spoke on the importance of how we respond to suffering in his speech "Suffering and Faith."

"As my sufferings mounted I soon realized that there were two ways in which I could respond to my situation — either to react with

bitterness or seek to transform the suffering into a creative force. I decided to follow the latter course," King said.

Following the death of Trayvon Martin, young Black citizens' involvement in organizing and activism surged. Shortly after Martin's death gained media attention, FAMU alumni Phillip Agnew helped form the Dream Defenders and led Florida college students in rallies and protests. Agnew's leadership is just one example of how Black people have transformed the suffering into a "creative force."

As a community we still have a ways to go in transforming our suffering, but Capers is pleased with how we have continued to fight for Martin and others like him.

"I definitely think it's [activism in 2020] doing it justice," Capers said. "I think the only time it doesn't do justice is when people try to use it as a tool... for their own personal gain. When it starts becoming less about the cause and less about us and when it becomes 'Well how can I bring attention to me?'"

The legacy of Trayvon Martin's life and death eight years later still resonates with many Black individuals. We will continue



# Odds stacked against many young Black men

**Maya Porter**  
News Editor

Research done by two social work PhD candidates at Washington University in St. Louis, points to some disturbing trends. Robert Motley and Andrae Banks examined barriers and facilitators to professional mental health service use for Black male trauma survivors ages 18 and older.

Their research involving trauma and mental health services use found that 56-74 percent of Black males are exposed to traumatic events and may have an unmet need for mental health services. Mental health conditions suffered by Black men due to trauma range from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and anxiety to schizophrenia, and substance abuse.

As reported by the 2019 U.S. census, there are roughly 43 million African Americans living in the U.S. Aside from the lack of mental health resources available in low-income Black communities, Black men are not accessing necessary mental health services simply because they have not been educated on the topic. But what happens when Black men and children aren't taught how to identify their trauma? They become desensitized.

Atlanta native Mychael Taylor knows all too well about the permanent effects of desensitization following trauma induced by gun violence.

"It always makes you think twice about every situation you put yourself in," Taylor said. "Like, parties and everything because it's like, if you hang around or trust the wrong people you can be in the wrong situation at the wrong time."

According to research completed by EveryTown and EveryStat, in Georgia, Black people are 6 times more likely than whites to die by gun homicide. Georgia is No. 11 for the highest rank of gun homicides in the country.

Most young Black men from Black communities have lost a close friend or relative

to gun violence by the time they are 18. For Taylor, his first encounter with gun violence occurred at age 18.

"I was a senior in high school when one of my patnas got shot and killed," Taylor said. "We were both 18."

With firearms being the No. 2 cause of death for children and teens in Georgia, Taylor's experience with gun violence and trauma opened his eyes. "I look at it as a lesson," Taylor said. "I have a different outlook on death so it's like, you learn when someone gets shot who you should and shouldn't hang around."

Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine authors report from a study of 7- year-olds in an urban neighborhood that 75 percent had heard gunshots, 18 percent had seen a dead body, and 61 percent worried some or a lot that they might get shot or killed.

At the young age of 7, Miami Gardens native Verdell Goines witnessed the murder of a middle aged man from his neighborhood.

From the neighborhood known as "Murder Gardens", Goines is one of the many young Black men whose lives revolve around the heart wrenching reality of the loss of friends and family due to gun violence.

"Mentally I didn't know how to feel because I was so young," Goines said. "But it definitely still affected me because until this I day I can still remember that moment vividly."

In Miami, young Black boys often can't escape the reality of gun violence. As reported by the Miami Herald, between February 14 of 2018 and February 14 of 2019, 1,157 kids were killed by a firearm. The report includes the devastating massacre at the high school in Parkland where 17 students and staff at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School were killed.



**Photo by Maya Porter**  
Mychael Taylor.

Fellow Atlanta native Alec Daley was also a victim of gun violence at a young age. When Daley was 10, his wwwgod brother was killed in a shooting.

"I had experienced a death in the family before, but this was different," Daley said. "Knowing that his life was taken away at 19 still haunts me to this day."

As reported by EveryTown and EveryStat, 175 kids and teens are killed by firearms each year in Florida. Between 2013-2017 EveryTown reported that 12,839 people had been killed by guns. This places Florida as the 19th highest rate of homicides in the country.

Among the victims was the best friend of Verdell Goines. On July 27, of 2017 around 10:30p.m., Goines says his best friend was killed.

"We were both outside at night, we were neighbors, and I went inside to get something. After a few minutes all I heard was gunshots. While I was inside I was holding



**Photo by Maya Porter**  
(Left to right) Alec Daley & Verdell Goines.

my mom down because I didn't know who or where they were shooting at. And while I was doing that I was praying that my best friend didn't get hit," explained Goines. "But unfortunately when I went outside I had seen that it was him that got killed."

Goines' was weighted with grief and the stress of reporting to Florida A&M that following month.

"It was tough for me because immediately after I had to see my best friend, who I met at five years old, laying there in a box, I had to leave to go miles away from home where I didn't know anyone," said Goines. "I never had time to process my feelings. It is definitely something that sits on the back of my mind everyday."

If you or a loved one suffer from any type of mental distress or extreme grief following a traumatic event, or would like to talk to licensed psychologist & psychiatrists please call the NAMI HelpLine at 1-800-950-NAMI.

# Tallahassee addresses crime, gun violence

# Tatiana Camacho

Staff writer

Tallahassee has seen a spike in violent crimes over the last three years. The violence is mostly committed by teens and young adults.

With the help of different programs, the city is encouraging teens to turn away from violence and embrace other opportunities.

In 2019, Leon County was ranked as having Florida's highest crime rate per capita for the fifth year in a row. The county's total crime index was 13,026, with 1,167 aggravated assault cases, 351 robberies and 20 homicides as reported by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

Officer Kevin Bradshaw, the public information officer for the Tallahassee Police Department, says there are multiple levels of crime that are committed. It begins with misdemeanor crimes, such as children getting into fist fights, which could turn into felonies later in life.

“Of course, there is no hard and fast rule, but in general, we will see the younger

kids involved in the pettier crimes and as they get up in their later teenage years, we'll see more of the serious crimes on the felony side," Bradshaw said.

Tallahassee City Commissioner Curtis Richardson says that adults contribute to the community's gun violence issue by leaving their loaded weapon in unlocked cars.

"Over the last year or two, 53 percent of gun-related incidents involve a gun that was stolen from someone's car," Richardson said.

Earlier in the 2019-2020 school year, three students from Godby High School were fatal victims of gun violence. Randi Lundgren, chair of the Fine Arts Department at Godby, said gun violence can be traumatic for the entire school.

"Anyone who experiences violence in any way is affected not only physically but emotionally. It's bound to negatively impact their academic success as well," Lundgren

said.

According to a study conducted by the University of Southern California, being exposed to early community violence will cause less school engagement. Having youth engaged with school and being academically successful often coincides with less exposure to community violence.

Not being able to perform well academically and having exposure to community violence causes elevated levels of psychological distress or difficulty staying focused.

There are a few local programs that have been effective in preventing children's involvement with gun violence, and are offered year-round.

One of these programs is Tallahassee Engaged in Meaningful Productivity for Opportunity (TEMPO). This program is offered for ages 16-24 who have dropped out of school and are unemployed. It is an outreach program that reaches people in

what is called a promise zone. A promise zone is an area which contains high crime rates, abuse, poverty and violence.

Kimball Thomas oversees the program as the youth program manager of TEMPO. The TEMPO program has over 200 participants who work with local career sources and job finder providers to help them find employment. The program also continues to help in furthering a participant's education.

"We focus on them getting their GED and or high school diploma then making a transition into a community college to a four-year college or a technical, vocational school to get a skilled license or certification in a certain area," Thomas said.

For more information on signing up for TEMPO-Tallahassee, visit [www.talgov.com/neighborhoodservices/tempo-tallahassee.aspx](http://www.talgov.com/neighborhoodservices/tempo-tallahassee.aspx)

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# Journey





# Studies show Blacks more likely to be affected by gun violence

**Quintavia McKay**  
Assistant Online Editor

The use of firearms in America for a long time have been established as a God-given right. Not only is the right to bear arms established in the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution, but the powerful gun lobby the National Rifle Association may be the single-most powerful organization in the country.

But how do guns impact African Americans?

Recent studies through EveryStat have shown that 100 Americans are killed each day by guns in the United States, amounting to 36,383 people each year.

In the wake of police brutality and high crime rates in minority communities, it's a cause for concern because African Americans have been the largest race group to be killed by guns. African Americans have been proven to be twice as likely to be

killed by a white counterpart and ten times as likely to die by a gun.

According to the Pew Research Center, African Americans make up only a quarter of Americans who own a firearm.

After conducting a poll on gun protection 100 percent of participants did not own a gun personally, but 71 percent knew someone who did. Many were able to justify the use of guns as a way to protect and provide security but few could grasp the concept of needing a gun in general.

"When I think about guns, I think about hurting people," said Tracy Noze, a student at Florida A&M.

African Americans have been the highest minority group affected by gun violence in the U.S., making up only 13 percent of America's population, yet 87 percent of gun homicides.

There is no doubt that gun carrying var-

ies among demographics and citizens have multiple reasons for owning a gun, whether it be identity or physical protection.

"I feel like in this day and age they are essential because I have seen break-ins within my residential area and because I'm from Texas where guns are a really big part of our culture," FAMU student Patricia Crawford said.

In 2019, Texas was ranked No. 1 in the nation for the most registered gun ownership, according to Statista. And it has been ranked the 25th highest state in firearm homicide by EveryStat, where African American deaths by firearm are 5 times as likely to happen at the hand of a white counterpart.

Texas gun ownership averages at 35 percent equaling to only 588,696 total registered guns out of the state population of 29,472,295 people, not including the

number of non-registered firearms bought and sold.

"But I also feel like the government picks and chooses who can practice their Second amendment right," Crawford said.

The process to obtain a gun is a restricted one. The struggle for minorities to obtain firearms include extensive background checks, licenses and certifications for some but not all sales, and vary from state to state.

For all of the firearms accounted for the number of non-registered guns remains unknown, but the simple fact is there are more deaths than recorded gun possessions. Gun ownership has had a domino effect in America affecting those who own guns — and those who don't.

## Was Charles Gee a typical victim of gun violence?

**Alexis Hamilton**  
Staff Writer

Charles Gee never expected to be a victim of gun violence. Gee, an attorney who graduated from the FAMU College of Law, was an undergraduate at FAMU when he learned how guns can change a person's life.

"I didn't really think that could be my reality," Gee said. "I kinda thought I was immune to gun violence."

Gee was shot six times in a bar on West Tennessee Street after an escalated altercation with an artist who was unable to perform during a talent showcase that Gee was hosting.

The bullet that went through his throat affected his larynx and his speech to this day. Yet in many ways Gee fits a profile for Tallahassee victims of gun violence.

Tallahassee Police Public Information Officer Kevin Bradshaw said that both victims and suspects of local gun violence are "overwhelmingly African American" and



Courtesy of Charles Gee.  
Charles Gee, a gun violence survivor.

between the ages of 20-25.

For some, that's not a hard statistic to believe. Tallahassee resident Tony Ash's friend Devin Landers was shot and killed in 2017. "The lifestyle that we live, it's bound to happen," Ash said. "When you carry yourself a certain way in this city, anything can happen at any time."

Landers, an African American, was 24 years old when he was shot by Lapadre Sharpe in the Dixie Condos off Dixie Drive.

Bradshaw explained that the Tallahassee Police Department gets calls all the time about gun violence, and TPD breaks it down into three categories to get the most accurate statistics. The categories are calls where people are shot at but not hit, shot at and injured, and shot at and reported dead.

"That's generally how we track it," Bradshaw said.

To crack down on the gun violence in Tallahassee, Bradshaw described the dif-

ferent initiatives and tactics put into place, including the "9 p.m. routine."

"We are constantly urging people to lock their vehicles," Bradshaw said.

He noted that a lot of the shootings can be traced back to auto burglaries. People will go into vehicles and steal firearms which in turn are used when disputes become deadly.

Lawrence Revell, Tallahassee's new chief of police, is establishing an advisory committee. This gives residents in the community a chance to voice their concerns about their area's problems directly to Revell.

While it seems easy to pinpoint the origin of gun violence in Tallahassee, local authorities are looking to build trust within the community to decrease these incidents.

## ONGOING CRISIS, continued from page 1

“As far as what we’re doing moving forward, Chief Lawrence Revell, who just took office at the first of the year, has a lot of programs in place to increase community involvement,” said Bradshaw. “Community involvement is one of the biggest things Chief Revell wants. We can’t be there standing in everybody’s yard in the city to make sure nothing bad happens to them. So when people start seeing things that concern them, they feel comfortable calling us.”

Bradshaw also noted that on average, victims and suspects alike are almost unanimously African-American males between the ages of 23 and 25. This average may be influenced by outliers such as the recent three teenage arrests made on Feb. 11 following a drive-by shooting on Blair Stone Road, and the guns are typically stolen during auto-burglaries.

On a micro-level, Bradshaw suggests that people take their firearms inside with them, as it isn’t safe to leave any valuables in the car. The big picture, however, is that Tallahassee as a community has a lot of healing to do as it tries to engage young man who feel disenfranchised.

For Isaiah “Ike” Wilson, the owner of Hiz & Herz Hair Studio that occupies the former storefront of Clippers Barbershop on South Adams, dealing with the stigma attached to areas riddled with gun violence has been frustrating for business yet inspirational and humbling.

“When I first inquired about this place people were saying, ‘Wow, you want to take a chance on that place? That’s a gangster spot...that place is cursed.’ But it’s incidental,” Wilson said. “A lot of people, even the lady next door, suffered.”

When Wilson’s business was Clippers Barbershop last summer it was the site of two fatal shootings. In June, barber Tyras “T.J.” McKinney was gunned down in front of his son by a fellow barber and Alex Harvey was found dead behind the barbershop in August.

“In order [for the community to heal], first you have to accept that it happened. Then you have to make sure it doesn’t happen again. And you can’t screen people to know what kind of person they are but when your energy attracts that type of stuff, that’s what you get,” Wilson said.

Wilson, who recently returned from



Photo courtesy of Bleu Bell.

Hiz & Herz Hair Studio is currently undergoing renovations before it’s grand opening. This storefront was formerly Clippers Barbershop, which saw two fatal shootings last summer.



Photo courtesy of Bleu Bell.

Tallahassee Police Department Public Information Officer Kevin Bradshaw.

Bermuda, has been multitasking, renovating the shop with his own two hands in between clients. One of his friends and longtime supporters, Tiffany Belvin, was present during the first fatal shooting at Clippers.

“The atmosphere over here was very nerve racking and the poverty went up because so much was going on that made people not want to come over here to do business. The atmosphere was very scary, let alone with the university across the street. I can only imagine being a student going to school and you’ve got gunshots coming, flying everywhere,” Belvin said.

Until their grand opening in April, the Hiz & Herz team remains optimistic and believes positive energy, good vibes and a complete makeover can turn business and the neighborhood around. Wilson plans on painting a mural on the inside of the shop dedicated to victims of gun violence, such as his son, McKinney, and others whose lives were cut short.



Photo courtesy of Bleu Bell.

Hiz & Herz Hair Studio owner Ike Wilson cuts hair when he’s not renovating the shop.

Senior information technology student Cedric Tisdale is also still in recovery mode after a shooting last April where he was struck in the back of the leg outside a house party near Florida A&M University’s campus.

“Mentally it didn’t really affect me, but growing up in Miami that happens all the time,” Tisdale said. “I don’t let it bother me, even though it was a major thing that happened to me. I still dance, I still play football, but at the same time, it does still hurt [physically] and feels weird knowing that I had two holes in my leg.”

Tisdale believes that gun violence is a cultural thing that “depends on the mindset of the people.”

Adner Marcelin, president of the NAACP’s Tallahassee branch, believes that gun violence comes from a lack of economic opportunity and is something the city needs to address.

“One of the things I have advocated for as president of the Tallahassee NAACP branch is that you have to take a holistic view as to why people are committing crimes. People don’t wake up and say, ‘I wanted to commit a crime today.’ People commit crimes when they

see opportunity,” Marcelin said.

Marcelin noted that one thing the NAACP has been asking for is more opportunity, growth and the creation of jobs. Specifically, a convention center on the south side of Frenchtown.

“When looking at south side, you have to build economic opportunity,” Marcelin said. “When there’s more productive things to do, people won’t resort to a life of crime.”

Overall, there’s a consensus that the community as a whole needs to be more proactive and hands-on with battling gun violence in Tallahassee.

The Blueprint group, which consists of faith and community leaders, officers and lawyers started meeting this year to discuss a game plan for tackling gun violence. Their overall goal is to get out into the community and reduce crime while working with at-risk youth.

The last meeting before they report their findings to city commissioners and state leaders is scheduled for Thursday, March 26 at 2 p.m. at the Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church, at 2015 Lake Bradford Road.



# Local gun club promotes education and safety

**Julious Lowe I**  
Staff Reporter

At the Talon Gun Range in nearby Midway, the Florida Capital City Gun Club (FCCGC) is involved in its weekly meeting and fellowship.

A chapter of the National African American Gun Association, the primary purpose of the club is to involve interested members in the Big Bend in shooting sports, as well as educate others on how to properly handle and safely use firearms, both for self-defense and recreation. FCCGC also promotes fellowship and community service.

These goals are achieved through practicing, safety courses, shooting competitions, offering concealed weapons classes, and community outreach activities. FCCGC president Larry Simmons Sr. went into detail on some of the main services provided by his gun club.

“One of the main things we do as a community service is work with people who have never fired a firearm before. So we have basic firearm training in which we teach things like basic stances, firearms rules, how to grip a firearm, aiming techniques, and the different types of firearms. What we don’t do is put an actual firearm in their hands, we give them a BB pistol with an orange tip, we have them demonstrate that they can perform the basics before we put a real firearm in their hands,” Simmons said.

Andrew Dixon has been a member of the chapter for about a year since meeting Simmons, and he recommends the FCCGC to anyone new to firearms who want to come and learn how to be a better shooter.



Photo Submitted by Julious Lowe.

Club president Larry Simmons, taking a club member through the club’s firearms training class using an empty BB pistol.

“I have my daughter out here with me, she’s learning how to shoot. Our president and vice-president are very knowledgeable on how to operate firearms and how to

teach you how to shoot firearms. So yeah, I would recommend anyone who’s interested to come out and learn how to shoot,” Dixon said.

The FCCGC provides various educational and concealed weapons training programs and opportunities, so that those new to firearms can more easily identify and chart a path that best helps them develop and further refine their marksmanship and defensive skills. Simmons said many women in the Big Bend come to FCCGC to become certified gun owners.

“You get a lot of women that have never touched a gun who often feel the need to protect themselves. So we have a class certified by the state of Florida where certified instructors teach firearms safety and concealed carry. Meaning they can receive a certificate they can submit to the state of Florida for a permit to carry firearms. Then we invite them to come out here to practice their marksmanship,” said Simmons.

The members of the FCCGC are pro-Second Amendment rights gun owners, who believe in responsible gun owners having the right to bear arms. FCCGC vice president Antonio Hall, who owns a security company and an AR-15 believes the weapons he owns are not the problem, but the people operating them.

“I know the AR-15 has a bad rep. I own several, probably am going to go buy several more. The guns aren’t the problem it’s the person with the gun that’s the problem, because the gun isn’t going to shoot itself. Plus, there’s already millions on the streets, so what are you going to do about the people who already have them if you ban them,” Hall said.

**Jade Patterson**  
Staff writer

Growing up in this type of environment can shape a person, especially during adolescence.

Hunt said he is numb to gun violence. Laron Fryson and Kumasi Kareem were two young men who Hunter regarded as

"I was 8 years old when I heard gunshots, and I'm like, 'What is that?' My dad had told me that point there was no hiding me from the reality of the world I



**Photo courtesy of FAMU Athletics**  
FAMU football wide receiver Chad Hunter

He added: "A gun don't make you stronger, it don't make you a man. Anyone can pull a trigger."

## FAMU STUDENT MEDIA IS THE ANSWER

