

Episode 7 - Video Podcast - A Black Veteran's Double War Donté Perez Jones Survived Combat, But Not Whitpain Township

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So today we're diving into a story that's, well, it's really tough. It's about the death of a single soldier, but it's also about the massive questions his case brings to light and a family's fight for answers. All right, let's get right into it.

At the absolute heart of this story is a mysterious death, one that officials wanted to close the book on fast, but his family, they're just not having it. Just imagine for a second hearing those words. That's what Dante Perez-Jones' mother was told.

That was one of the very first things she heard in her search for the truth. Just unbelievable. So here are the basic facts as we know them.

On June 17th, 2022, Dante Perez-Jones, a U.S. Army veteran, was found dead in a park in Pennsylvania. The police, they pretty quickly ruled it a suicide, but for Dante's family, that conclusion isn't just wrong, they are convinced it's a coverup. So who was Dante Jones? Well, he wasn't just a headline.

He was a 35-year-old dad to three kids. He'd served six years in the Army, he had a college degree, and had just gotten his commercial driver's license. You know, he was building a future.

And according to his mom, he didn't do drugs, didn't drink. Not to really get why his family is so suspicious, you've got to zoom out a bit. Dante's story, it doesn't exist in a vacuum.

It's deeply connected to the long, complicated history of being a Black veteran in America. There's actually a term for this experience. It's called the double war, and it gets right to the point.

It's the reality of fighting for your country overseas, while at the exact same time having to fight racism right here at home. And this is not some new thing, not at all. Black Americans have served in every single conflict this country has ever had.

And yet, after World War I, Black veterans were literally lynched for daring to wear their uniforms in public. In World War II, you had the Double V campaign, V for victory abroad and V for victory at home. And by the 1970s, the Department of Defense itself confirmed there was systemic discrimination happening in its own justice system.

This quote from Richard Brookshire of the Black Veterans Project, man, it just hits the nail on the head. He points out that the default image of a veteran in the American mind is a white man. And what that means is that the unique struggles of Black veterans often get completely ignored.

And look, the data, it backs this all up. These historical problems are still with us. Back in the 70s, Black service members were way overrepresented in court-martials.

Fast forward to the 2000s, and they were still up to 2.6 times more likely to face disciplinary action than their white peers. The pattern is just undeniable. And the fallout from this? It can be absolutely devastating.

This kind of disparity can lead to something called an other-than-honorable discharge. And that's not just a piece of paper. It can literally slam the door on life-saving VA benefits.

We're talking healthcare, housing assistance, education. It's a punishment that follows a veteran for the rest of their life. Okay, so this isn't just a military issue.

When you look at the civilian legal system, the same system that handled Dante Jones' case, data from the Philadelphia DA's office shows some eerily similar trends. Let's break down these numbers, starting with who gets charged in the first place. For 6 of the 8 most common offenses, from aggravated assault to robbery, you see Black individuals are disproportionately charged.

And it's not just if you get charged. It's what you get charged with. The data shows Black and Latinx individuals are more likely to face serious felony charges, while white defendants are more often charged with lower-level misdemeanors.

And that, of course, has huge consequences down the line. The pattern just keeps going, even before a trial starts. Take a look at this graph.

It shows that white defendants are consistently more likely to be released before their trial without having to pay cash bail. And get this, that gap didn't even close after a major policy reform. And all of this, it all culminates at sentencing.

And yeah, you probably guessed it, the pattern holds. For a whole range of common crimes, the data is clear. On average, white defendants get shorter prison sentences.

It just shows how these small disparities at every single step can add up to a huge difference in the end. So with all that as a backdrop, let's bring it right back down to the ground. To the exact place where Dante Jones died.

Because the setting here, it's a big part of the story. His body was found in a place called Bluebell, Pennsylvania. We're talking about an affluent suburb where the median property value is well over half a million dollars.

On the surface, it's the picture of peaceful, quiet, suburban America. But you know that picture-perfect image? It's got some cracks. Just a few years before Dante's death, in a nearby town, police had to investigate swastikas being spray-painted on a Jewish family's car.

It's a stark reminder that hate can surface absolutely anywhere. And there seems to be this

undercurrent of distrust in the community itself. This comment, from a local Reddit thread, it accuses local officials of corruption.

It's a small window into the fact that Dante's family isn't the only one questioning the people in charge. And all of it, the history, the national data, the local tensions, all of it brings us right back to Dante's family and their agonizing, ongoing fight for simple answers. His mother's words here are just so incredibly powerful.

She says, look, my son was a soldier. He went to war for this country. You cannot tell me he didn't know how to defend himself.

To her, for this to happen, somebody had to have done something to him. The official story just makes no sense. And her disbelief, it's not just a feeling.

It's built on some really specific, really disturbing questions. Like why were his feet touching the ground? Why was his wallet gone? Why were they told an autopsy wasn't needed and the case was already closed? Why were they refused the right to see their son's body, or even just photos from the scene? And why in the world were the surveillance cameras in the At the end of the day, the case of Dante Jones is so much more than one family's devastating tragedy. It really forces us to ask a bigger question.

When you have a family's desperate search for truth crashing against an official story they just can't believe, all set against this huge backdrop of documented inequity, where do you even begin to look for justice?

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