



**Carmage Walls**  
**Commentary Prize**

**2019 Entry Form**

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**Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.)**

This editorial put into context a controversial police shooting at a Hoover mall about 100 miles south of Decatur. The editorial made important points in the ongoing national debate about police shootings and gun rights. It also put into perspective that there were no failures to follow accepted procedures in this case, only a victim fatally shot and an officer scarred by the ordeal.

# Two good guys with guns is tragic

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## THE ISSUE

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The tragic police shooting of an innocent man holding a gun at Riverchase Galleria is a cautionary tale for a state that is too quick to believe that public safety benefits from more good guys with guns.

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**E**J Bradford could have been a poster child for the National Rifle Association.

On a busy Thanksgiving night at the Riverchase Galleria in Hoover, Emantic “EJ” Bradford Jr. was the good guy with a gun. He had a concealed carry permit, according to his father. He had no criminal record.

In the seconds after shots were fired at the mall, Bradford initially ran for safety, according to a report released Tuesday by the Alabama Attorney General’s Office. Then he bravely pulled his gun and approached the danger, attempting to assist the shooting victim. As others panicked, the armed Bradford was determined to help.

Up to this point in that tragic evening, Second Amendment enthusiasts could have pointed to Bradford with I-told-you-so grins. A crowded mall, shots fired by a bad guy, but the good guys were empowered. Because Bradford had a gun.

The NRA theme, however, quickly unraveled. Not because Bradford shot the wrong guy, as sometimes happens, but because there were other good guys with guns.

Hoover police had been trained in active shooter situations, and that’s what they confronted at the Galleria. They heard two shots. They saw an injured man being assisted by another man. Scared shoppers were running in every direction.

“Next, I observed an armed suspect quickly moving toward the two males standing near the railing,” said unidentified Officer 1, quoted in the attorney general’s report. “The suspect was advancing on the two males and had a black handgun in his right hand. I fired my duty weapon at the armed suspect to stop him.”

At least one officer, who had a different vantage point, knew Officer 1 had shot the wrong man. Others thought he had targeted the active shooter. One said he would have shot Bradford too, but he “believed that the threat was eliminated when EJ Bradford fell

to the ground.”

Officer 1 shot Bradford in his lower back, in the back of his head and in his neck.

Bradford fell down and died, his handgun sliding across the mall floor.

Had events played out differently, Officer 1 would have been a hero.

“I turned toward the noise, drawing my firearm. ... I instinctively started moving toward the area where the gunshots were heard while looking for immediate threats,” he told investigators.

Indeed, that’s precisely what Bradford did. Now one good guy is dead, and the other — while he will not be charged — must live with the knowledge he killed an innocent man.

The idea that a good guy with a gun helps protect the public from an active shooter makes a good slogan, and occasionally it may even be true. It can be disastrously false, however, if there’s more than one good guy with a gun.

Attorney General Steve Marshall — endorsed by the NRA, proudly forcing city halls to allow gun-toting patrons, and enforcing a law allowing school administrators to be armed — implicitly acknowledged Tuesday the problem with guns in a public place as he declined to file charges against Officer 1. In the chaos of an active shooter situation, even trained police officers struggle to distinguish between good guys with guns and bad guys with guns.

“Officer 1 responded to an active shooting scene inside a crowded shopping mall,” according to the attorney general’s report. “Just three seconds after hearing two gunshots, Officer 1 encountered an armed individual (EJ Bradford) who — unlike every other person at the scene — was running toward the shooting site, rather than fleeing from it.”

Bradford’s death is tragic. It’s also a cautionary tale to a state that is too quick to believe that equipping more good guys with guns increases public safety.