

SUNDAY

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The Times-Picayune

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DAILY & BREAKING NEWS AT

LIFE AND DEATH DECISIONS

SELF-DEFENSE KILLINGS RISE IN N.O. EVEN AS MURDERS FALL

CHRIS GRANGER / STAFF ARCHIVE

By Naomi Martin
Staff writer

One minute, a man and woman were sitting in their backyard in Algiers. The next, a masked gunman lay dead, the trigger pulled by the husband. The Aug. 20 bloodshed marked the seventh New Orleans homicide this year that police ruled justifiable. Two killings were by police officers. Five were by civilians. Lovers' arguments led to two deaths. In another, a friendship dissolved, giving way to anger. And four men shot and killed strangers — other men who, police said, were committing rape, home invasion, armed robbery

or pointing a gun at a cop. As the number of murders in New Orleans has dropped for the past three years, self-defense killings have not. The seven justifiable homicides so far this year is more than double the three committed in 2013, and could match the nine recorded in 2012. As a percentage of all homicides, however, New Orleans' self-defense killings are on par with national numbers. In the past three years, justified killings have made up between 2 percent and 7 percent of the city's homicides, while nationwide they made up 5 percent of all intentional killings in 2012, the last year for which FBI data is available.

See SELF-DEFENSE, A-8

'It was me or him,' woman says of killing her boyfriend

By Naomi Martin
Staff writer

To Kawanda Hampton, a car burglary saved her and her children's lives. Earlier this year, her boyfriend, Jemond Carson, left his pistol in a car and someone stole it. Three days later, Hampton says, the couple got into a fight and Carson beat and choked her. She couldn't breathe. Her world started to close. She gasped for her 12-year-old son to get her a knife, and he did. She swung it at Carson, trying to ward him off. As he lunged at her, she stabbed him in the chest, she said.

See HAMPTON, A-10

JULIA KUMARI DRAPKIN / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

FEB. 13 Kawanda Hampton, 37, LEFT, stabbed her boyfriend Jemond Carson, 29, while she was being choked in her eastern New Orleans home, police said. Hampton was charged with obstruction of justice after she threw away the knife and at first told police her son stabbed Carson.

Seven killings this year have been classified as justifiable by the NOPD

AUG. 20 An unidentified Algiers homeowner shot and killed Keith Jay Jones, 25, a masked, armed intruder who tried to force his way into the home, police said. The homeowner's three daughters were inside. The NOPD is still investigating and will provide a final report to prosecutors.

MAY 29 Officer Emile Segu of the Southern University of New Orleans Police Department shot and killed Jose Valerio, 17, as Valerio tried to rob at gunpoint three women whose vehicle was on the side of the road in Gentilly with a flat tire, the NOPD said. Prosecutors have not yet received a report from the NOPD.

MARCH 14 Eugene White, 25, shot and killed his onetime friend, Benjamin Valteau, 25, outside the Jazz Daiquiris bar in Central City after Valteau pulled a shotgun and pointed it at him, police said. The case is still under review by prosecutors.

MARCH 13 An unidentified man shot and killed Samuel Raines, 26, while Raines was allegedly sexually assaulting an unidentified woman. The man used a gun that Raines had been wielding, police said. Prosecutors have not yet received a report from NOPD.

FEB. 22 Eugene McGee, 22, shot and killed Devonte Vance, 21, after Vance shot him in an apartment complex courtyard in eastern New Orleans. Vance was threatening his ex-girlfriend, whom McGee was visiting. After Vance threw a brick through her window, McGee confronted him, police said. McGee, while deemed justified in the shooting, was charged with obstruction of justice for asking someone to move the gun, out of fear of being caught violating his parole. He pleaded guilty and got a 20-month prison term.

FEB. 16 New Orleans police officer Jonathan Hirdes shot and killed Keith Atkinson, 31, outside a Hollygrove convenience store while responding to a shoplifting call. Authorities said Atkinson had a gun, and Hirdes was cleared by the NOPD and the District Attorney's Office of any wrongdoing.

Baptists gather in N.O.

On the agenda: social justice

By Adriane Quinlan
Staff writer

The country's largest organization of black Christians, the National Baptist Convention USA, will hold its annual summit in New Orleans starting Monday, drawing an estimated 18,000 people to a city that has not hosted the group since 2004. Over the four-day conference, members plan to discuss not only religious issues but social issues that are welling up within the walls of churches, across the United States and beyond. "It seems we're slipping back to the '60s civil rights era in terms of some of our behaviors as a nation," said the Rev. Morris Tipton, a convention spokesman. "With President Obama's administration, race relations have really reared their ugly heads. I've never seen it be this blatant in recent history."

See BAPTISTS, A-13

NATIONAL BAPTIST CONVENTION USA

7 million members

18,000 will attend convention

LANCE MURPHEY / THE ASSOCIATED PRESS ARCHIVE

The National Baptist Convention USA holds its 2009 annual meeting in Memphis.

island intrigue

A **KENNER** MAN IS MIRED IN A **MURDER** CASE THAT HAS CAPTIVATED THE **CARIBBEAN**

By Andy Grimm
Staff writer

Authorities in Curacao want a man who has been living in Kenner returned to the tiny Caribbean island to face charges in a murder-for-hire plot with ties to the assassination of a member of parliament. But Kenneth Godwin's defense attorney says his client might be murdered himself if he is sent back to Curacao. Investigators in the Dutch Antilles believe Godwin, 27, was involved in the killing of a man in Curacao in February, along with an accomplice who authorities say confessed to assassinating member of Parliament Helmin Wiels a year earlier, records filed by Curacao prosecutors said.

See CURACAO, A-13

WEATHER See A-20	THUNDERSTORMS HIGH 91° LOW 79°	BUSINESS A-16	LIVING D	PUZZLES D11-12	TELEVISION D13-15	177th YEAR
		CLASSIFIED G-4	LOUISIANA A-5	REFLECTIONS E	TRAVEL D-8	NO. 95
		DEATHS B-5	NATIONAL A-18	SPORTS C	WASHINGTON A-3	7 12393 22222 7

CONTINUED

Family says killing was not justified

HAMPTON, from A-1

Carson, 29, collapsed on the floor. He died later at a hospital.

"The Lord ended up taking that gun," Hampton, 37, said through tears Monday. "I know if he had that gun, he probably would've shot me and shot my kids that night."

The killing is one of seven in New Orleans this year that police say were justified. And Hampton is among 19 people who killed someone in self-defense since 2012, according to authorities.

Standing outside her single-story brick home in eastern New Orleans, Hampton recalled the lead-up to the early morning of Feb. 13, when she took the life of her 1-year-old's father. Her voice cracked, and tears streamed down her face as she remembered the fight. She held her toddler, who looked up at her.

In Hampton's interview with a reporter and in a police report, a picture emerged of a volatile relationship in which an otherwise ordinary dispute could get out of hand.

The fight came as the couple was breaking up after three years, she said. They had lived together in Houston and gotten each other's names tattooed on their bodies. The word "Jemond," in cursive, still adorns her finger and her left calf.

But their fights were ugly. He would hit her, choke her and sometimes brandish his gun, she said. One time, Hampton said, her pregnant cousin tried to intervene. Carson spat on the cousin and hit her, she said. Another time, her son hit Carson with a frying pan to get him off Hampton.

"Jemond was a sweet person, but he would click out," she said.

Hampton said she was afraid to call the police, both because she didn't want Carson to grow



A photo of Jemond Carson shows a happy time for the family. Police have called Carson's killing a justifiable homicide, saying Kawanda Hampton's use of force 'was appropriate.'



angrier and because she didn't want him to be extradited to North Carolina, where she said he told her he was wanted for murder. Carson's father disputed that, saying Carson was wanted on charges of possessing a gun and marijuana as well as fleeing the police.

Carson's family members, however, point to the lack of police reports as proof that Hampton is lying about the abuse.

"She's been coached up to play that domestic violence card, but there's no record of it," said Carson's uncle, Dwight Carson Sr.

The night of the killing, Hampton said, she saw Carson at a nightclub talking to another woman. She grew mad, because he had fought with her earlier in the week about her talking to another man in a club. She confronted him, slapped him and told him she was done with him, she said. But when

she returned around 2:30 a.m. to her home in the 7200 block of Bunker Hill Road, he was inside. She immediately felt his hands on her neck, choking and shaking her, she said. He hit her and held her hands behind her back. She could tell he had been drinking, and he often abused pills when he went out to the club, she said. She said she asked him to leave, but he refused.

Her 12-year-old, who was in the living room, yelled for him to stop hurting her, she said.

Hampton said her vision started narrowing and she couldn't breathe. She gasped for her son to grab her a knife from the kitchen. He did. It was sharp; she had just bought it at Family Dollar.

"You better leave," she said she yelled as she swung the knife, in an attempt to get Carson to get away from her. He lunged toward her and the knife plunged into his

chest, she said. She said she didn't know she had stabbed him until he slowly collapsed near a wall, muttering, "You stuck me." He died that night in a hospital.

Hampton's account is corroborated by a police report, which says the stabbing came as Hampton was being beaten and choked. Her son told police that he fetched the knife for his mother and put it on a chair near her, New Orleans Police Department detective Greg Hamilton wrote in the police report. The son said his mother then grabbed it and stabbed Carson, who ordered the child to leave the room before he collapsed, police wrote.

"Through the investigation it appeared to NOPD that her use of force was appropriate given the situation she was put in," Sgt. Nicholas Gernon, commander of NOPD's homicide unit, wrote in an email.

Police ruled the killing justified, and prosecutors agreed there was not enough evidence to prosecute Hampton, a district attorney's spokesman confirmed. But Hampton was still charged with obstruction of justice.

Unaware that she was within her rights to kill in self-defense, Hampton lied to police at first. She said her 12-year-old son had stabbed her boyfriend, and that the slaying weapon was a knife she had cleaned and returned to a kitchen drawer before officers arrived, police reports say.

But police found a bloody knife

in a trash bin outside. Hampton's son told officers that he retrieved the knife for his mother at her direction while she was being choked, but that she did the stabbing. Hampton soon admitted she lied because "she was afraid," and that her son was telling the truth, police say.

"I was scared," Hampton said through tears in an interview this week. "I didn't want to go to jail and have to leave my kids. But it was me or him. I'm not an evil person."

"My intention was not to stab him," she added. "My intention was on getting him away from me."

Carson is buried. Hampton is home while her case is pending in Orleans Parish Criminal District Court. But the weight of what happened keeps her in tears and sometimes locked in her room, she said.

She said she worries what her toddler will think when he grows up and finds out she killed his father. "How do I explain that to him?" she said.

"That was the worst day of my life," she said. "I don't wish that on nobody."

Hampton said she wanted to share her experience so

other women heed her warnings: "If you're in an abusive relationship like that, you need to get out," she said. "They're going to tell you they're going to stop and they ain't going to do it no more."

"It's going to happen again. Over and over. Until you decide to leave them."

But Carson's mother and uncle, who live in Statesville, N.C., said they don't believe Hampton's account. They said they saw no defensive wounds on Carson's body or arms, leading them to believe he was stabbed while he was lying down, or possibly even asleep.

"If they let her get away with murdering my child, I'm sad and I'll be sad until the rest of the days I live," said Carson's mother, Vicki Foster. "I can't do nothing about it."

Dwight Carson said his nephew was fast and agile, and would never have been stabbed unless he was ambushed. "If he had some defensive wounds, I would say, 'OK, they might have been in a scuffle.'"

An NOPD report does not go into detail about whether Carson's body showed defensive wounds.

"I just call it a plain case of murder," Dwight Carson added.



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Cases involve thorny issues

SELF-DEFENSE, from A-1

These are messy, complex cases that take an emotional toll, for both the dead person's family and the survivor who took the life.

They are also challenging for law enforcement to investigate. Thorny legal issues cloud the thin line that separates whether the shooter is considered a perpetrator or a victim, a murderer or a hero.

"We have to make sure somebody's not using a justifiable-homicide defense in an attempt to evade justice, when they've actually committed a murder," said Sgt. Nicholas Gernon, commander of the New Orleans Police Department's homicide unit.

But he added: "To put somebody in jail who committed a justifiable homicide is tragic as well."

Police investigate every homicide the same way, he said, collecting evidence and seeking independent witnesses to determine whether the self-defense claim is valid.

After detectives draw a conclusion as to whether an arrest is warranted, they turn over their reports to Orleans Parish District Attorney Leon Cannizzaro's office. Prosecutors then often interview key witnesses themselves, or ask police to collect more evidence.

Louisiana, like many states, has a "stand your ground" law



Police investigate the fatal shooting of Keith Atkinson in Hollygrove on Feb. 16. Officer Jonathan Hirdes of the New Orleans Police Department had shot Atkinson outside a convenience store. Hirdes was later cleared by the NOPD and the District Attorney's Office in the killing.

PHOTOS BY KATHLEEN FLYNN / STAFF ARCHIVE

to the unusual scenario of a homicide detective testifying in support of a defendant.

"Unfortunately, sometimes violent people meet violent ends," Gernon said.

In some cases, the criminal and victim are relatively easy to identify. A man and a woman were walking in Bywater around 9:30 p.m. on March 13 when police say Samuel Raines, 26, forced them at gunpoint to a construction site behind a school, and made the woman to perform a sex act. The man grabbed Raines' gun and fatally shot him, authorities said. Police have not identified the shooter, saying he is a victim of a sex crime.

In another case, police say Emile Segu, an off-duty campus police officer with Southern University of New Orleans, was helping three women change a flat tire around 2 a.m. on May 29 in Gentilly, when a gunman jumped out of a car and demanded the purse of one of the women. Segu shot and killed the assailant, later identified as 17-year-old Jose Valerio, who was awaiting trial on multiple robbery charges.

See SELF-DEFENSE, A-9



Stephanie Atkinson, left, was getting ready to go to a Carnival parade in February with her son Keith when he went out for cigarettes. He was fatally shot by a police officer on his way to the store. Atkinson and her daughter Shimeka Irons say they want answers.



FAMILY PHOTO

Keith Atkinson, 31, was shot dead Feb. 16 by a New Orleans police officer who was responding to shoplifting report.

that requires no duty to retreat if a person faces imminent danger.

The District Attorney's Office has in previous years brought

charges, even after police ruled a killing justified. This year, however, prosecutors have not pursued murder charges in any of

the seven cases — although several cases remain under review. In past years, charges in a case police deemed justifiable have led

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