



# Ferguson the Latest Front in the State's War on Black Community

## Local Cop Kills Black Teen, Militarized Police Kill Civil Rights

By Brandon R. Davis  
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In Ferguson, Missouri, the police killing of an unarmed black teenager has resulted in a tremendous backlash. A police officer, later identified as Darren Wilson, shot and killed eighteen-year-old Michael Brown on Saturday, August 9. Since Brown's killing, protesters have clashed with police in Ferguson on a nearly nightly basis, as over 150 officers, including canine units, state police, and now the National Guard have been dispatched throughout St. Louis County to quell the unrest.

After a vigil was held for Brown on Sunday, August 10, a few angry residents took to the streets, looting and vandalizing local business. Unfortunately, emotions and frustrations can get the better of people in situations like Ferguson, and ill-intentioned individuals use this tension as a catalyst to create havoc. The militarization of local police has turned minority neighborhoods into occupied zones of limited liberty and property rights, bringing their residents to a breaking point.

The underlying issue is how police departments are turning urban neighborhoods into police states, applying excessive force in instances of unrest like Ferguson. From Jon Burge's "Midnight Crew" to New York police officers strangling a man in broad daylight, urban neighborhood residents have come to fear not just criminals, but the very people meant to "protect and serve" the community.

Time and time again, instances of police brutality against ethnic minorities have gone unquestioned and unpunished. In 2013, some 169,252 entirely innocent people were "stopped and frisked" in New York City, 85 percent of which were minorities. This is down from the 605,328 innocent people who were "stopped and frisked" in 2011. In Illinois, Representative Monique Davis asked the governor to deploy the state National Guard to assist with law enforcement in Chicago. Davis believes that the National Guard would be better able to subdue inner-city neighborhoods — an unprecedented show of state power.

Beginning with the failed “war on drugs,” the creation of the police state has been fueled by the federal funding of local law enforcement. The police state is directly connected with the disproportionate number of minorities coming into contact with police. The Sentencing Project reports that there are currently over 2.2 million people incarcerated in the United States, with an additional 4.8 million under the control of the criminal justice system through parole and probation.

There are roughly six African Americans to every one white person incarcerated in the United States. Far too often, this increased contact equals increased use of lethal force, such as in the case of Michael Brown. Unfortunately, there is no good source of data on police use of deadly force. However, a 2012 comparison study of extrajudicial killings in major cities found staggering results.

In New York City, for example, researchers found 87 percent of the people police killed were African Americans. In Chicago, that number grows to 91 percent. In the cities of Rockford, Illinois, and Saginaw, Michigan, while the total number of people police killed was far fewer, *100 percent* of them were black.

This same report also found that police, security guards, and vigilantes in the United States were responsible for the deaths of 313 African Americans in 2012. That amounts to police forces killing one African American every 28 hours.

This trend in police violence and increased security presence in minority communities has fueled a mix of resentment and distrust toward local police departments. The Cato Institute’s Jonathan Blanks and Radley Balko have aptly documented the problems with overcriminalization, the militarization of local police, and the questionable constitutionality of policing tactics.

From the Nixon administration to now, the “tough on crime” agenda has consistently used incendiary rhetoric to advance restrictive policies and oppressive tactics to police urban neighborhoods.

The Clinton administration’s 1994 Crime Bill enacted tougher anti-crime measures that increased prosecutions, built more prisons, and enacted stiffer penalties for offenders. The Byrne JAG Program (JAG) was created in 2005 by merging the Edward Byrne Memorial Grant Program (Byrne) with the Local Law Enforcement Block Grant Program (LLEBG). These grants give money to local law enforcement to purchase military equipment. Clinton’s crime-fighting policies resulted in the largest increase in federal and state inmates than any other president in history. Under the Obama Administration, the JAG/Byrne funding has reached an all-time high.

It is an oppressive state that minority communities should be suspicious of. A House Judiciary Committee hearing found that the United States has reached an incarceration level (approximately 700 jailed per 100,000) that has become detrimental to society and actually contributes to more crime. Therefore, police militarization in minority communities not only threatens civil liberties and increases tensions between citizens and law enforcement, it is ultimately counterproductive to its stated goals.

US Americans of all stripes should stand up to state oppression, driven by big government and the drug war, that is systematically dismantling civil liberties, not just for minorities but for everyone.