



If There Are Good Cops Out There, Prove It

As another unarmed black man is gunned down by police, if you're out there, good cops, it's time to show yourselves.

By Albert L. Butler

August 12, 2014

There are no good cops.

Yes, you read that right. From where I sit, right now, in this moment in time, in the wake of tragic incidents that have transpired over the last few weeks. There are no good cops in this country. Not when another innocent black man—this time, 18-year-old Michael Brown—is gunned down while minding his damn business and yet another unarmed black teen “suspect” lies dead on a city street.

I didn't always feel this way. As I started my radio broadcast career, whenever an incident of police misconduct would cross my radar, I would say things on air like: “This isn't a reflection on all the decent police out there every day serving the public good...” or “Lets not let one bad apple...”

But no more.

There are a lot of bad apples out there spoiling bunches of departments, and every incident of police brutality or death of an unarmed teenager reflects on every police officer in their respective ranks. We've seen too many incidents, after the fact, of police attacking the reputations of their victims, fabricating reports and planting evidence, all in the name of covering up the truth. And my question is, who's policing them?

I don't know exactly when I changed my view. Maybe it was after 92-year-old Kathryn Johnston was killed in her home after a drug raid on the wrong house; or maybe when Sean Bell was shot down the night before his wedding; or maybe it was when a Philly news helicopter taped over a dozen cops beating three “suspects” after a brief car chase. I'm not sure when it was, but one day I realized I was tired of the silence. And one thing all these incidents and the countless others around country—reported and unreported—have in common is silence. We don't hear from the “good cops.”

No press conferences denouncing the actions of a few bad apples. No open letters putting the bad guys on notice that abusing the color of authority will not be tolerated. No public petitions demanding action from higher ups and local government—and absolutely no change in police

union leadership. Sure, there are the requisite pressers after an incident by a police chief and possibly the mayor, but nothing from the rank and file, nothing from police groups and associations.

The Blue Wall of Silence is deafening.

What we do hear are plenty of excuses—police brass and city officials all but tripping over themselves to get to a microphone to announce that “We thought he had a gun,” “She refused to comply” or “the suspect had priors.”

And before you know it, the police officer in question is the victim and the whole incident becomes the community’s fault or the parents’ fault, until finally it falls on the person in the hospital or the morgue and now they’re responsible for their own condition. And then there’s the catch-all phrase you hear from police commissioners everywhere:

“Being a police officer is stressful.”

Maybe. But being an innocent civilian confronted by police is pretty damn stressful, also—especially if you are black or brown. And if it seems like there’s an up-tick in incidents lately, it’s probably due to the sheer numbers of cameras around and more officers getting caught in the act, but the feeling isn’t purely anecdotal, and police violence isn’t something new.

In 2007, USA Today reported Justice Department statistics that showed a surge in police brutality cases since 9/11. In addition, the Cato Institute’s 2010 National Police Misconduct Statistics and Reporting Project found that “the overall US average police misconduct rate appears to be climbing in comparison to both last year’s rate and the previously reported rate 3 months ago...” and “the number of officers involved in excessive force reports appear to be demonstrating an overall trend increase since the beginning of 2010.”

So where is the change? Right now, there’s really none, and there will be none as long so-called good cops stay quiet.

From my own experience—taking numerous calls from Philadelphia police over the years, I know there are officers that want to speak out and take action to change the culture. But they’re afraid. Afraid of reprisals from higher-ups, afraid of retaliation from their peers, some were even afraid that cops wouldn’t back them up on the street.

The “bad police” culture is so broad and so deep that even the department designated to go after them is called the “rat squad.” Think about that.

Meanwhile as we march for justice, police departments demand that we, the citizens, help them to solve crimes.

So I’m challenging you, good cops—if you’re out there—show yourselves. You can’t solve crimes without us, and we can’t solve the problem of police brutality without you. We need you. Michael Brown needed you. Eric Garner needed you. Marlene Pinnock needed you. Kenneth Chamberlain Sr. needed you. Aiyana Jones needed you. Now, more than ever.

If there are good cops out there, prove it.

Albert L. Butler is a Philadelphia-based writer and broadcaster.