



Glenn: The father of militarized policing was both a progressive and a Nazi sympathizer

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For weeks, Glenn has been teasing the progressive figure that changed policing as we know it today. Why have local police forces become increasingly militarized? It all goes back to a man named August Vollmer...

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Below is a transcript of this segment

In the founding days of America, there was a partnership, citizen and officer. They were one in the same, but that mentality began to change during the progressive era and largely thanks to one man, August Vollmer. He was famous all over the world as a lawman above lawmen who changed policing for the better. Academics revere him. So, who is he, and how did he change American law enforcement?

Well, Vollmer was born to immigrants from Germany in New Orleans. Eventually his family settled down in Berkeley, California. He was just another face in the crowd, but in 1904, that would all change. He happened upon a railway train. There was a car rolling down the tracks unattended. It was heading directly for a coach car filled with commuters. August ran off in pursuit of the train. As the entire town looked on, he managed to catch up to the train, jump on board, grab the brakes, and he stopped it just in time to save scores of lives. Well, now, he was a local hero. The notoriety propelled him to the position of town marshal.

He didn't have much experience, but he did have a military background. So, he began structuring the Berkeley, California police in exactly the same way the Marine Corps was structured. He was the first to give police officers a military rank structure and designated military style uniforms.

“They started to use and look to the military as a way of organizing a police force. So, they would have uniforms, and they would have military rankings captain, major, that sort of thing. That's where we begin to see the beginnings of the modern police force,” explained Tim Lynch, Director of the Project on Criminal Justice for the Cato Institute.

The door now was opened in exactly the direction the founders warned against. This was all happening at the dawn of the progressive era where they were pushing eugenics and other scientific methods at prominent universities. Woodrow Wilson himself was president of Princeton University during this time, and like most progressives, August Vollmer believed only educated men and women were good.

He started issuing IQ tests before hiring officers. The policeman's job is the highest calling in the world. The men who will do that job should be the finest men. They should be the best educated. They should be college graduates. That's what policemen should be. And what are they? Dumbbells. Vollmer's ideas came largely from Europe. Criminology textbooks from Austria and France were used in America's first police school. He created one of the first centralized police record systems in 1906. There were fingerprints, blood, and other samples that were stored. He was the first to hook people up to a lie detector and use that to determine guilt.

His star began to rise, and in 1907, he was elected president of the California Association of Police Chiefs. Vollmer's criminal justice methods were now made into a college degree at the University of California and spread to all universities all over the country. His methods utilizing military rank structure, uniforms, the scientific method, and university level education were highly sought after, but he wasn't finished.

He instituted the first motorized patrols. This is where the first real disconnect between police officers and the community began to creep in. Before Vollmer, law enforcement officers were part of the community and the local neighborhood that they helped to protect. They patrolled the streets on foot and quite often lived amongst those that they served. Now, officers with military ranks and uniforms responded to calls from outside of the community, rolling in on police cars and motorcycles. They were outsiders. Some felt protected. Some began to feel invaded.

“For many of the large cities, most of the police that are operating on the streets don't even live in the cities anymore, and that's a huge mistake. Your local police should be local police. You should know them. You should be able to contact them. Most of the people who are running in New York and Baltimore by the way, in Baltimore we saw the riots in April 2015. Seventy percent of the police live outside of Baltimore, some as far away as Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Bad mistake,” said John Whitehead, founder of the Rutherford Institute.

In 1921, August Vollmer was elevated to the president of the International Association of Chiefs of Police. He traveled all over the country refining law enforcement agencies. He moved to Los Angeles and became the chief of police there. By 1930, he had completely and fundamentally transformed law enforcement in the United States.

Law enforcement was destined to evolve, and not all of his changes were necessarily negative ones. As the urban population began to boom, it was inevitable, but Vollmer did something our

country had been resisting since the birth of our nation. He set the framework for a militarized force within our own borders, patterned after the military and with progressive policies. It didn't have to evolve that way, but the progressives made it happen.

Now, most people see August Vollmer as a man before his time, a true innovator and a hero to the profession. At least, that's what academia thinks of him, but progressive academia tends to look favorably on progressives. The FBI wasn't so thrilled with him. In the 1930s and 40s, the FBI had this man under surveillance. You'd think that's kind of odd considering he was known as the father of modern law enforcement and praised in virtually every write-up about him. Remember, Vollmer's family, however, was from Germany, a pesky little fact nobody wants to teach anymore.

It turns out that Vollmer was a member of the German-American Bund, a Nazi sympathizer. They held Nazi-style rallies where they displayed Nazi insignia and gave each other the Heil Hitler salute. They wore military style uniforms and had their own rank structure. Sound familiar?

They saw America as three separate administrative divisions and held training camps in each. What did they think about our country and our values? Well, earlier I quoted George Washington, and up until Vollmer's time, Americans had honored his vision, but Vollmer's Nazi group had a very different view. They claimed George Washington was America's first fascist and that he never actually believed that democracy would work.

Vollmer was not the hero the progressives want us to believe. He may have been well-meaning, but he was a progressive and a Nazi who began the militarization of America's local police force. It was the first shift away from Washington's vision, and it was the opening of the door creating the social divide between communities and law enforcement.

The system used to be a pact and partnership between civilian and officer where both helped each other to maintain order, and it had been altered. The fallout were urban neighborhoods who slowly began to view law enforcement more like an invasion force rather than a partner. Does any of this now sound familiar?