



Rand Paul: Blame Big Government For Ferguson

By Olivia Nuzzi
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The libertarian-leaning Kentucky senator said African-Americans feel “targeted” by militarized police responses, like the one in Ferguson, Missouri, over the death of teen Michael Brown.

Writing for *TIME*, Rand Paul—who is expected to mount a campaign for the GOP presidential nomination in 2016—addressed the crisis that has erupted in Ferguson, Missouri, in the wake of the shooting of unarmed teen Michael Brown. Paul writes that due to the convergence of the “militarization of law enforcement” and the “erosion of civil liberties,” Americans, and particularly African-Americans—feel as though they are being “targeted” by the government.

“If I had been told to get out of the street as a teenager, there would have been a distinct possibility that I might have smarted off. But I wouldn’t have expected to be shot,” he writes. “Given the racial disparities in our criminal justice system, it is impossible for African-Americans not to feel like their government is particularly targeting them.”

Paul warns against a police state, noting that there “should be a difference between a police response and a military response,” and expressing concern that “the images and scenes we continue to see in Ferguson resemble war more than traditional police action.”

Unsurprisingly, given his self-described “Libertarian-ish” limited-government leanings, Paul blames big government for the rise of militarized law enforcement.

As *Slate*’s David Weigel notes, Paul uses the writings of three libertarian-leaning figures—Glenn Reynolds of *Instapundit*, Walter Olson of the Cato Institute, and Evan Bernick of the Heritage Foundation—to help make his case that “big government has been at the heart of the problem. Washington has incentivized the militarization of local police precincts by using federal dollars to help municipal governments build what are essentially small armies—where police departments compete to acquire military gear that goes far beyond what most of Americans think of as law enforcement.”

Paul, who has reached out to black voters in speeches and through policy—he is currently working to overhaul the criminal justice system with Sen. Cory Booker, the New Jersey Democrat—took a much harder stance on Ferguson’s police response than fellow would-be 2016 contender Ted Cruz, the junior senator from Texas, who only went as far as to concede that “reporters should never be detained” and “civil liberties should be protected.”

But Paul was not alone in his bold response. Justin Amash, the libertarian-leaning congressman from Michigan, tweeted:



And then, fittingly, Amash retweeted Paul:



Senator Rand Paul ✓

@SenRandPaul

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Anyone who thinks that race does not skew the application of criminal justice in this country is just not paying close enough attention. And the root of the problem is big government.

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