



Rand Paul has it right regarding Ferguson

By Nat Hentoff
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We may eventually know the actual facts in the killing of 18-year-old Michael Brown by policeman Darren Wilson in the Missouri town of Ferguson, but the widely publicized full-scale war on protesters there by the police has finally begun to alert Americans of all backgrounds to the militarization of law enforcement in many areas of our nation.

Constitutional lawyer John Whitehead, founder and president of civil liberties defender The Rutherford Institute, has been reporting often on this aggrandizement of our police:

“This is not just happening in Ferguson, Missouri. As I show in my book ‘A Government of Wolves: The Emerging American Police State,’ it’s happening and will happen anywhere and everywhere else in this country where law enforcement officials are given carte blanche to do what they like, when they like, how they like, with immunity from their superiors, the legislators and the courts ...”

Also reporting on police militarization is Walter Olson of the Cato Institute:

“Why armored vehicles in a Midwestern inner suburb? Why would cops wear camouflage gear against a terrain patterned by convenience stores and beauty parlors? Why are the authorities in Ferguson, Mo., so given to quasi-martial crowd control methods.”

Olson added: “The dominant visual aspect of the story, however, has been the sight of overpowering police forces confronting unarmed protesters who are seen waving signs or just their hands.”

Meanwhile, in a recent op-ed in Time, senator and possible 2016 presidential candidate Rand Paul noted: “There is a systemic problem with today’s law enforcement. Not surprisingly, 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 ... Americans think of as law enforcement.

“Americans must never sacrifice their liberty for an illusive and dangerous, or false, security. This has been a cause I have championed for years, and one that is at a near-crisis point in our country.”

Reading that, I'm looking at the photograph accompanying Paul's column. A mother and her tiny child in Ferguson are holding signs nearly covered by tear gas: "Stop killing us."

Rand Paul's messages are reaching places that hitherto have not paid much attention to him. For instance, in the Aug. 20 New York Post, columnist Jacob Sullum wrote:

"He is challenging members of his own party to rethink their reflexive support of law enforcement and tough-on-crime policies."

Sullum cited this sentence from Paul's op-ed: "There is a legitimate role for the police to keep the peace, but there should be a difference between a police response and a military response."

I, for one, hope Rand Paul will be a 2016 candidate for the presidency, and we may have a chance to get our Constitution back.