

Civil Rights and the Militarization of Police: Lessons from the Gestapo, America's Path to Tyranny

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The world is watching what is happening in Ferguson, Missouri. After the announcement by the grand jury that Officer Darren Wilson was acquitted for the shooting death of Michael Brown, angry residents took to the streets of Ferguson and other towns and cities across the U.S. to protest police brutality. The U.S. government has the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) along with the Ferguson police department and the Missouri National guard ready to confront the angry protesters with force.

Michael Brown's murder is not the only incident that sparked riots. There have been other similar incidents involving police brutality such as the Rodney King beating by the Los Angeles Police Department in 1991 that also sparked riots. The Police used excessive force against the Occupy Wall Street movement in New York and other anti-Establishment protests across the U.S. In 1997, NYPD officers sodomized a Haitian immigrant by the name of Abner Louima with a broken-off broom handle after he was arrested during an altercation between the police and patrons outside a Brooklyn nightclub. He was hospitalized and most of the police officers involved were not found guilty because of insufficient evidence, except for one of the officers who received a 30-year sentence.

Following the verdict of the Michael Brown case, another African-American man was recently shot and killed by an NYPD officer in a housing project in East New York, Brooklyn. White Americans have also been victims of police brutality. In 2012, Kelly Thomas, a 37-year-old homeless man with schizophrenia was beaten to death by two veterans of the Fullerton Police Department in California. Both men were acquitted by the grand jury. Although statistics do show that minorities are more likely to get harassed (by Stop and Frisk in NYC for example), arrested and even murdered by the police. The *United Nations Human Rights Committee* issued a report on human rights abuses in the United States which included the epidemic of police brutality. It stated:

Excessive use of force by law enforcement officials.

The Committee is concerned about the still high number of fatal shootings by certain police forces, including, for instance, in Chicago, and reports of excessive use of force by certain law enforcement officers, including the deadly use of tasers, which has a disparate impact on African Americans, and use of lethal force by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers at the United States-Mexico border.

Another report just released by Reuters, published by the United Nations Committee against Torture:

“urged the United States on Friday to fully investigate and prosecute police brutality and shootings of unarmed black youth and ensure that taser weapons are used sparingly” the report said. “The committee decried “excruciating pain and prolonged suffering” for prisoners during “botched executions” as well as frequent rapes of inmates, shackling of pregnant women in some prisons and extensive use of solitary confinement.”

What was deeply concerning for the committee was *“Its findings cited deep concern about “numerous reports” of police brutality and excessive use of force against people from minority groups, immigrants, homosexuals and racial profiling.”* New York City’s controversial ‘*Stop and Frisk*’ Policy which effects mainly African Americans and Latinos and to a lesser extend whites is a policy that reflects what happened during Nazi Germany as former congressman and former mayoral candidate Anthony Weiner was once quoted as saying that:

Last year more than 700,000 people in New York were stopped, the overwhelming majority of them were young men of color; 97 percent of them did nothing wrong. And the mayor stood up and said ‘wait a minute, statistically this’ and ‘statistically that.’ Well, you can have a 100 percent statistical reduction in crime if you stop everybody. You could have 1938 Germany, because everyone has to show their papers.

Weiner was correct to point out the dangers behind *“Stop and Frisk”* although the media criticized his comments because he was accused of comparing New York City to Nazi Germany, but the policies that allow the NYPD to stop you based on suspicion is Nazi-like.

U.S. law enforcement in the U.S. has been heading towards what Germany became, a totalitarian police state. Why such a stark comparison? Not only police brutality is a major problem, but there are other factors to consider. The history of the Gestapo has many parallels to what the U.S. law enforcement on the federal and local level has become. After Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, he appointed Hermann Göring as Interior Minister of Prussia allowing him to become head of the largest police force in Germany. Göring filled the ranks with Nazis in both the political and intelligence sections of the police. By 1933, Göring merged both units to form the Gestapo. He was soon head of the Gestapo in 1934 and extended the agency’s authority under Hitler’s leadership. Then Göring gave the command of the Gestapo to Heinrich Himmler that same year. Hitler then appointed Himmler as the chief of all German police outside Prussia. Then Reinhard Heydrich was named chief of the Gestapo by Himmler on April, 22 1934. On June 17th, 1936, Hitler unified all of the police forces in the Reich and named Himmler as Chief of German Police.

The Gestapo became a national state agency and gained authority over all of Germany’s uniformed law enforcement agencies and had the authority to investigate alleged acts of treason, espionage and other activities seen as crimes against Germany, in particular against the Nazi Party. The Gestapo operated without any judicial review by state imposed law, putting them above the law, relatively speaking. The Gestapo used *Schutzhaft* or “protective custody” to imprison people without judicial proceedings. The system was that the prisoner was ultimately forced to sign their own *Schutzhaftbefehl*, an order to allow themselves imprisoned out of fear that agents would personally torture or even execute them. Thousands of political prisoners throughout Germany and occupied territories under the *Night and Fog Decree* disappeared under the Gestapo. The Gestapo’s tactics

rooted out political opponents of the Nazi Party. Communists and religious groups who attended church were spied upon. The communists, working-class people, and even far-right conservative organizations covertly fought against the Nazi's which led to mass arrests.

"Racially undesirable elements" such as the Jews, criminals, homosexuals, and the Romani people were also sent to concentration camps or were executed. Student protests were crushed. Businessmen, office workers, teachers, and others that resisted the Nazi party were in danger of Gestapo informants and agents if they held rallies opposing the Nazi party which in fact is a familiar pattern in the U.S. today.

The main stream media, specifically The New York Times reported that "The federal government has significantly expanded undercover operations in recent years, with officers from at least 40 agencies posing as business people, welfare recipients, political protesters and even doctors or ministers to ferret out wrongdoing, records and interviews show." The *"See something, Say something"* campaign in New York City is a "Snitch" program to root out terrorism. But the question is who is a terrorist? According to an analysis by *zengardner.com* explains in the *'Season of the Snitch'* how the "Snitch Mentality" operates:

This is America today. "If you see something, say something." It doesn't matter if you see something that means nothing. The man in the Ohio Walmart store that was killed by the SWAT team for carrying around an "assault weapon" which ended up being an empty pellet gun taken off the rack at the store is a good example. Maybe they should have given the person who called it in a key to the city for such a courageous act. He could share it with those brave trained killers who understood the situation no more than he did.

The snitch mentality appears to be popping up everywhere these days, even when the informant doesn't get anything out of it. How much worse will it be when they do?

When the dollar collapses and the people who didn't see it coming are caught totally unprepared, what are the chances that they will rat out those who did? I'm sure that their masters will be happy to reward them by giving them some of their neighbor's supplies once the "prepper" has been taken away to the FEMA camp.

But I suppose that we shouldn't be surprised. When living in a country that has never learned to mind its own business concerning the affairs of people in other countries, how much less will it tolerate the affairs of others in their own?

Not only is the federal government has covert operations and "Snitch" programs directed against the public, a report by the *Center for Investigative Journalism (CIJ)* titled *'US police get antiterror training in Israel on privately funded trips'* explained what were the motives behind Israel's security apparatus training U.S. law enforcement:

The clouds of tear gas, flurries of projectiles and images of police officers outfitted in military-grade hardware in Ferguson, Missouri, have reignited concerns about the militarization of domestic law enforcement in the United States.

But there has been another, little-discussed change in the training of American police since the 9/11 attacks: At least 300 high-ranking sheriffs and police from agencies large and small - from New York and Maine to Orange County and

Oakland, California – have traveled to Israel for privately funded seminars in what is described as counterterrorism techniques.

The collaboration between American Police Departments and Israel's training seminars is disturbing development especially since the Israeli Security forces has committed numerous human rights abuses against the Palestinians for decades. The report also stated which police departments had participated in the seminars:

The U.S. program began less than a year after 9/11, when the Jewish Institute brought nine American police officials to Israel to meet with Uzi Landau, Israel's public security minister at the time. Participants represented the New York and Los Angeles police departments, the Major County Sheriffs' Association, the New York and New Jersey Port Authority police and the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority police. Recently, the seminars drew attention during the Ferguson protests because the former chief of the St. Louis County Police Department, who retired in January, had participated in a 2011 trip to Israel sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League

Rashid Khalidi, a professor of modern Arab studies at Columbia University said "If American police and sheriffs consider they're in occupation of neighborhoods like Ferguson and East Harlem, this training is extremely appropriate – they're learning how to suppress a people, deny their rights and use force to hold down a subject population" the report stated.

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The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) also has numerous reports concerning police brutality, but it goes a step further and analyzes which particular groups are particularly affected when it comes to the police in the United States. Mathew Harwood wrote a piece for *Tom Dispatch* and described how SWAT teams were using force when executing search warrants. He also mentions what the ACLU found in a report titled '*War Comes Home*' on raids conducted between 2011 and 2012:

In more than 60% of the raids the ACLU investigated, SWAT members rammed down doors in search of possible drugs, not to save a hostage, respond to a barricade situation, or neutralize an active shooter. On the other side of that broken-down door, more often than not, are blacks and Latinos. When the ACLU could identify the race of the person or people whose home was being broken into, 68% of the SWAT raids against minorities were for the purpose of executing a warrant in search of drugs. When it came to whites, that figure dropped to 38%, despite the well-known fact that blacks, whites, and Latinos all use drugs at roughly the same rates. SWAT teams, it seems, have a disturbing record of disproportionately applying their specialized skill set within communities of color.

Think of this as racial profiling on steroids in which the humiliation of stop and frisk is raised to a terrifying new level.

The New York Times reported that during the Obama administration "*police departments have received tens of thousands of machine guns; nearly 200,000 ammunition magazines; thousands of pieces of camouflage and night-vision equipment; and hundreds of silencers, armored cars and aircraft.*" The parallels of the U.S. and Nazi Germany policing methods are too similar to ignore. A retired Philadelphia police captain, Ray Lewis who joined Ferguson

Protesters told Al Jazeera:

For one, I want to give the residents of Ferguson the knowledge there are some police that do support them. The second thing, I want to try to get a message to mainstream America that the system is corrupt, that police really are oppressing not only the black community, but also the whites. They're an oppressive organization now controlled by the one percent of corporate America. Corporate America is using police forces as their mercenaries.

Captain Ray Lewis statement reflects on what happened to the Occupy Wall Street movement when the NYPD used "Excessive Force" to remove the protesters. The tragic death of Michael Brown and the actions taken by the Ferguson Police department and the Missouri National Guard is what the Gestapo would have done against any protests that would oppose the rule of law of the Nazi Party. The U.S. has been an Orwellian police state for a very long time, with the Jim Crow Laws in the South followed by the FBI's COINTELPRO program to the NSA spy scandal today, the Gestapo comes to mind. History is actually repeating itself.

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