

Killer Cops Boost Body Count in War on Black America

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“Go where you may, search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the Old World, travel through South America, search out every abuse, and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me, that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival....” – Frederick Douglass, July 5, 1852

“When President Obama insists that racism is not, and has never been, ‘endemic’ to this country, he is simply identifying himself as an active participant in the ongoing slaughter.”

The United States produced a bumper crop of what Billie Holiday would call “Strange Fruit,” in March: at least 111 bodies, the majority of them unarmed men of color, shot down by police in the blood-fertilized streets of American cities. If one just counts the unarmed victims, that’s a rate of about two extrajudicial executions per day, roughly twice the “one every 28 hours” cited by the Malcolm X Grassroots Network’s 2012 report, [Operation Ghetto Storm](#).

Yet, in the same month, President Obama declared Venezuela a [threat to the national security](#) of the United States, based largely on the death of 14 “dissidents” during a period of anti-government disturbances back in 2014. Many of the dead were pro-government activists killed by “dissidents.” By contrast, Philadelphia police have been shooting an average of [one person a week](#) for the last eight years, the overwhelming majority of them Black and brown, according to a new U.S. Justice Department report. As Frederick Douglass said, “for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival.”

All across the country, the granting of impunity for the perpetrators of summary execution of Black men, women and children is “everyday practice” – now certified as “best practice” by Attorney General Eric Holder, who claims court precedents preclude prosecution of killer cops except under the most extreme conditions. (See “It’s Not the Law – but Prosecutors – That Give Immunity to Killer Cops,” [December 10, 2014](#).)

Given the odds against prosecution, officer Michael T. Slager probably counts himself the unluckiest white man in South Carolina. A neighborhood resident’s phone camera captured Slager firing repeatedly into the back of 50 year-old Walter L. Scott, a Black North Charleston father of four with no criminal record who had been stopped for a minor traffic violation, tussled with the officer, and tried to run away.

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Despite his claims to have been in fear for his life, Slager was charged with murder – a fate he would surely have avoided had he been under the jurisdiction of St. Louis prosecutor Bob McCulloch. Last year, McCulloch’s team led grand jurors to believe that “the law” allowed police to use deadly force against unarmed persons fleeing a felony, as Ferguson officer Darren Wilson claimed was the case with Michael Brown. However, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled such shootings [unconstitutional in 1985](#), as every public defender knows – and McCulloch surely knew, as well. The South Carolina cop also had the bad judgment to commit murder in [clear view](#) of a private citizen’s well-held camera.

Last weekend in the town of Zion, Illinois, about 30 miles north of Chicago, cops killed 17-year-old Justus Howell with [two shots to the back](#) while he was running away, according to the coroner’s office. Initially, the police reported no weapon on his body, but later the cops claimed the teenager had stolen a gun from another man minutes earlier, leading them to give chase. In time, the cops produced a gun, which they will connect to the other Black man, who was held on \$15,000 bail, and thereby seek to justify the killing of the unarmed, fleeing teenager Justus Howell.

Cleveland cop Michael Brelo distinguished himself as the most murderous member of a mob of 104 cops on a chase-and-shoot spree in Cleveland, Ohio, back in November, 2012. Mistaking a car engine backfire for a gunshot, the crazy cop caravan careened through Cleveland at speeds reaching 100 miles an hour, cornering Timothy Russell, 43, and Malissa Williams, 30, in a school parking lot. Russell and Williams, unarmed, died in a [hail of 137 bullets](#) – 49 of them fired by Officer Brelo, now on trial for voluntary manslaughter. Brelo and his partner fired 15 bullets through their own windshield at the Black victims’ car. Then, at a point when, according to the prosecutor, no cop’s life was in danger (except from other officers), Brelo jumped on the hood of the victims’ car and fired 15 more shots at the mortally wounded man and woman. Today, the cop says he has no recollection of the entire episode.

In December, the U.S. Justice Department concluded that Cleveland cops routinely use [excessive force and are unaccountable](#) to the public. The month before, in November, a city cop killed 12 year-old Tamir Rice as he played with a toy gun at a park. The officer shot the child twice after observing him for a total of two seconds.

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Officer Brelo’s blank memory on the shootings of Timothy Russell and Malissa Williams, and officer Timothy Loehmann’s blink-of-an-eye deliberations on terminating Tamir Rice, point up the utter lack of value U.S. society places on Black lives. The high-profile killings this week, the obscene death toll last month, the unreported and delayed deaths, are a constant in the bloody history of America. When President Obama insists that racism is not, and has never been, “endemic” to this country, he is simply identifying himself as an active participant in the ongoing slaughter.

The police, as guardians of the State, believe they are simply doing their jobs. They must be right, since they continue to receive praise, protection and overwhelming white support for carrying out their mission as an army of occupation in Black America. The advent of the Internet and a heightened Black community awareness of police depredations, especially since the murder of Trayvon Martin, in February of 2012, has created the perception among many African Americans that police violence has dramatically increased in recent years. However, history and irrefutable statistics tell us that the “militarization” of the police and

the criminalization of Black people as a group are fundamental aspects of a national mission begun in earnest in the late Sixties. Michelle Alexander calls it the “New Jim Crow.” Some of us at BAR prefer the term Mass Black Incarceration State, to describe the superstructure of Black control that has been erected over the past 45 years, a machinery that has so relentlessly criminalized the Black community that one out of every eight prison inmates on Earth is an African American. Any genuine movement for criminal justice “reform” must, therefore, aim to abolish the Mass Black Incarceration State, root and branch, by removing the “occupation” army from Black areas and replacing it with a force of Black people’s own choosing.

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The U.S government set in motion the mass Black incarceration regime in the late Sixties for the purpose of counter-insurgency. The structures of Black containment, control and incarceration are now central to the workings of criminal justice in the United States – to the misfortune of lots of white youth who get sucked into the system as unintended “collateral damage.” The logic of the project dictates that those who attempt to dismantle the Black counter-insurgency regime will be treated as insurgents, themselves – a central fact for the Black Lives Matter movement to grapple with.

The wave of state violence that smashed the Black Panther Party when it challenged the police “army of occupation” in the late Sixties, never subsided, but was instead hard-wired into the criminal justice system, nationwide. That’s why the system’s operatives are [still trying to kill Mumia Abu Jamal](#), a former Black Panther and probably the world’s best known political prisoner. That’s why so many other Party comrades are still behind bars – because they are symbols and icons of insurgency, and U.S. police and prison structures have been on a counter-insurgency mission for nearly half a century. And, that’s why the Black Is Back Coalition will hold a national conference on [Black Community Control of Police](#), in St. Louis, April 18 and 19 – because there will be no justice and no peace until the occupying army is gone from our streets.

Black people must decide how that can be accomplished – by any means necessary.

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