

# Police Brutality and the Raging Bulls in Blue: The Deadly Toll of Warrior Policing on Steroids

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Global Research, February 02, 2023

[The Rutherford Institute](#) 1 February 2023

*[“This is warrior policing on steroids.”](#)—Paul Butler, law professor*

*That the police officers charged with the [beating death of 29-year-old Tyre Nichols](#) are Black is a distraction.*

*Don't be distracted.*

*This latest instance of police brutality is not about racism in policing or black-on-black violence.*

*The entire institution is corrupt.*

The old guard—made up of fine, decent, lawful police officers who took seriously their oath of office to serve and protect their fellow citizens, uphold the Constitution, and maintain the peace—has given way to a new guard hyped up on their own authority and the power of the badge who have almost absolute discretion to decide who is a threat, what constitutes resistance, and how harshly they can deal with the citizens they were appointed to “serve and protect.”

Memphis' [now-disbanded Scorpion unit](#) provides a glimpse into the looming crisis in policing that has gone beyond mere militarization.

Unfortunately, while much has been said about the [dangers of police militarization](#), a warrior mindset that has police viewing the rest of the citizenry as enemy combatants, and law enforcement training that teaches cops to shoot first and ask questions later, little attention has been paid to the role that “roid rage,” triggered by [anabolic steroid use and abuse by police](#), may contribute to the mounting numbers of cases involving police brutality.

Given how prevalent steroid use is within the U.S. military (it remains [a barely concealed fixture of military life](#)) and the rate of military veterans migrating into law enforcement ([one out of every five police officers is a military veteran](#)), this could shed some light on the physical evolution of domestic police physiques.

A far cry from Mayberry's benevolent, khaki-clad neighborhood cops, police today are stormtroopers on steroids, both literally and figuratively: raging bulls in blue.

“Steroid use,” as researcher Philip J. Sweitzer [warns](#), “is the not-so-quiet little secret of state and city police departments.”

John Hoberman, the author of *Dopers in Uniform: The Hidden World of Police on Steroids*, estimates that there may be [tens of thousands of officers on steroids](#).

Illegal without a prescription and legitimized by a burgeoning industry of doctors known to law enforcement personnel who will prescribe steroids and other growth hormones [based on bogus diagnoses](#), these testosterone-enhancing drugs have become hush-hush tools of the trade for police seeking to increase the size and strength of their muscles and their physical endurance, as well as [gain an “edge” on criminals](#).

Having gained traction within the bodybuilding and sports communities, steroid use has fueled the dramatic transformation of police from Sheriff Andy Taylor’s lean form to the massive menace of the Hulk. As retired cop Phil Dees explains, “[Anabolic steroid use among law enforcement officers is prevalent among the subset of cops who are heavily into weight training](#). They usually stand out from the crowd, and anyone who cares to look can pick out the most likely suspects.”

Broad-shouldered. Slim-waisted. Veiny. Tree-trunk necks. Rippling physiques. And as big as action heroes. That’s how *Men’s Health* describes these “[juicers in blue](#)”: cops using a cocktail of steroid drugs to transform themselves into “a flesh-and-blood Justice League.”

“Because [juicing cops are a secretive subculture within a secretive subculture](#),” exact numbers are hard to come by, but if the anecdotal evidence is to be believed, it’s more widespread than ever, with 25% of police using these drugs to bulk up and supercharge their aggression.

Indeed, while steroids are physically transformative, building muscle mass, they are also psychologically affective, upping resistance to physical and emotional stress during periods of prolonged or heavy conflict, to the delight of the military, which was [involved in their early development and experimentation](#).

Cue the [rise of muscular authoritarianism](#).

As Philip Sweitzer [documents](#), “Cops on steroids are simply the natural evolution of a conscious decision by the federal government to promote military authoritarianism in drug enforcement, and the implementation of military technologies.”

Roid rage is yet another example of blowback from a militaristic culture.

There are few police forces at every level of government that are not implicated in steroid use and, consequently, impacted by “roid rage,” which [manifests itself as extreme mood swings, irritability, nervousness, delusions, aggressive outbursts](#), excessive use of force, a sense of invincibility, and poor judgment.

“For officers who work daily in high stress, high adrenaline environments and carry guns, [the ‘rage’ can be even more extreme](#),” concludes journalist Bianca Cain Johnson, eliciting “[a Hulk-esque response by those using steroids to normal situations](#).”

When that roid rage is combined with the trappings of a militarized cop armed to the teeth and empowered to shoot first and ask questions later, as well as to probe, poke, pinch, taser, search, seize, strip and generally manhandle anyone they see fit in almost any circumstance, all with the general blessing of the courts, the danger of any encounter with a

cop grows exponentially more deadly.

Given the growing numbers of excessive force incidents by police, especially against unarmed individuals, we cannot afford to ignore the role that doping by police plays in this escalating violence.

For instance, in one of the largest busts nationwide involving law enforcement, [248 New Jersey police officers and firefighters](#) were found to have been getting fraudulent prescriptions of anabolic steroids, human growth hormones and other muscle-building drugs from a doctor. A subsequent investigation of those officers found that [many had previously been sued for excessive force](#) or civil rights violations, or had been arrested, fired or suspended for off-duty.

As David Meinert reports, "[Steroid use has been anecdotally associated with several brutality cases and racially motivated violence by police officers](#), including the 1997 sodomizing of an Haitian immigrant in New York."

Not surprisingly, police have consistently managed to sidestep a steady volley of lawsuits alleging a correlation between police doping and excessive force, insulated by [a thin blue wall of silence, solidarity and coverups](#), powerful police unions, and the misapplied doctrine of qualified immunity.

Qualified immunity is how the police state stays in power.

Indeed, as Reuters reports, qualified immunity "has become a [nearly failsafe tool to let police brutality go unpunished](#) and deny victims their constitutional rights."

At its most basic level, what this really translates to is an utter lack of accountability, whether over police brutality or doping.

Despite concerns about roid rage by police, [few agencies carry out random tests for steroid use among officers](#), not even when an officer employs excessive force. Objections to such testing range from concerns about [availability and cost](#) to officer privacy.

As Hoberman points out, "The police establishment has reacted to the steroid culture by equivocating: announcing zero-tolerance policies while doing the absolute minimum to detect and control steroid use."

Thus, any serious discussion about police reform needs to address the use of steroids by police, along with a national call for mandatory testing.

For starters, as [journalist David Meinert suggests](#), police should be subjected to random drug tests for use of steroids, testosterone and HCG (an artificial form of testosterone), and testing should be mandatory and immediate any time an officer is involved in a shooting or accused of unnecessary force.

This is no longer a debate over good cops and bad cops.

It's a power struggle between police officers who rank their personal safety above everyone else's and police officers who understand that their jobs are to serve and protect; between police trained to shoot to kill and police trained to resolve situations peacefully; most of all, it's between police who believe the law is on their side and police who know that they will

be held to account for their actions under the same law as everyone else.

Unfortunately, more and more police are being trained to view themselves as distinct from the citizenry, to view their authority as superior to the citizenry, and to view their lives as more precious than those of their citizen counterparts. Instead of being taught to see themselves as mediators and peacemakers whose lethal weapons are to be used as a last resort, they are being drilled into acting like gunmen with killer instincts who shoot to kill rather than merely incapacitate.

We've allowed the government to create an alternate reality in which freedom is secondary to security, and the rights and lives of the citizenry are less important than the authority and might of the government.

As I make clear in my book [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#) and in its fictional counterpart [The Erik Blair Diaries](#), the longer we wait to burst the bubble on this false chimera, the greater the risks to both police officers and the rest of the citizenry.

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