

# Racism and Law Enforcement in the U.S.: Police Target Black Children

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When white teachers handcuff first graders, or white police throw Black tweens through glass windows, or shoot unarmed youths, it may be because of racially warped perceptions. “Black children are dehumanized to such an extent that they aren’t perceived as children at all,” says a recent study. “In some cases, black children may be viewed as adults when they are just 13 years old.”

“All across the country black children as young as kindergarteners have been hand cuffed and arrested as if they are adults.”

Americans should take a long look in the mirror before criticizing other nations for human rights abuses. The law enforcement system in the United States ranks among the worst in the world in the cruel treatment meted out to its citizens. Even children in this country are not safe if they are black and unlucky enough to interact with the police. Of all the various ethnic and national groups in the United States, only black people have to worry that their child may be pushed through a glass window by officers of the law.

A [recent study](#) published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology demonstrated what black people have always known. Black children are dehumanized to such an extent that they aren’t perceived as children at all. They are assumed to be older, less innocent and inherently guilty of some wrong doing. Study co-author [Matthew Jackson said](#), “With the average age overestimation for black boys exceeding four-and-a-half years, in some cases, black children may be viewed as adults when they are just 13 years old.” Two recent cases involving the New York City police department show the truth of these words and the perils black people face even in childhood.

Black girls are also at risk of [police brutality](#), as a 15 year-old and a 16 year-old discovered in Brooklyn, New York on March 27, 2014. An altercation between police and a group of teens resulted in one of the unidentified girls being thrown to the ground and another being pushed through a window. There is [video evidence](#) of one of the girls with a very deep cut on her face. According to witnesses, the police were not content to push her through the glass and arrest her. They also delayed in providing her with needed medical attention.

“Javier Payne was already under arrest and handcuffed when a police officer shoved him through a store window.”

In the Bronx, New York on May 17, 2014, a 14 year-old boy was also pushed through a

window by police and came close to death. As first reported by the Juvenile Justice Information Exchange, Javier Payne was already [under arrest and handcuffed](#) when a police officer shoved him through a store window too. The police added insult to his injuries when they did not notify EMS of a pediatric emergency, instead calling in the case as if Payne were a drunken derelict. When paramedics finally arrived on the scene they pleaded for Payne to be uncuffed so that they might provide appropriate treatment.

Payne's troubles didn't end at the hospital where he was still under arrest. As previously reported in Black Agenda Report, the NYPD shackles prisoners [to hospital beds](#) and restricts family visits. Javier Payne's status as a minor afforded him no consideration from this rule, and his mother was told that she could only see her 14 year-old son if she first received permission from the local precinct. These cases show in stark relief the indignities and the dangers every black American faces, regardless of age or gender.

It is easy to express outrage over individual cases but harder to sustain demands for change. Javier Payne's case came to the attention of [Rev. Al Sharpton](#), who invited the still recovering teenager to attend a press conference. The case certainly begs for media attention and legal action against the officer and the NYPD but Sharpton's chicanery and role as "[King Rat](#)" should not be forgotten at such a critical juncture. Nor should he be allowed to use Payne's case to get back into the good graces of a concerned community now that his services are no longer wanted at the lame duck White House.

"The NYPD shackles prisoners to hospital beds and restricts family visits."

Police in New York City are certainly not alone in their barbaric treatment of minors. All across the country black children as young as kindergarteners have been hand cuffed and arrested as if they are adults. Adults are killed for little or no reason and the police are rarely held to account. If there were true justice in the world a foreign power would declare a responsibility to protect black people from their government and demand that America's leaders be tried before the international criminal court.

When politicians and pundits declare that country x is rife with human rights abuses we must first ask how that country compares to our own. No other is as big a jailer and no other allows the cruelty which is accepted here. Does Vladimir Putin preside over police departments that push teenagers through glass windows? Every year more than 1,000 Americans are shot by the police. Is the same statistic true in Russia? If that were so, the media would be sure to tell us all about it.

America leads the world in human rights abuses and that is because of racism. Two New York City teenagers faced this issue first hand, but they aren't alone. There are so many like them, trying to live as children in a country which denies them that right.

*Margaret Kimberley's Freedom Rider column appears weekly in BAR, and is widely reprinted elsewhere. She maintains a frequently updated blog as well as at <http://freedomrider.blogspot.com>.*

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