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Dimitri Antoniou

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The irrational justification of police brutality



Dimitri Antoniou May 31, 2020 · 4 min read

I believe that I can engage with my network on shared values of equality of all persons and logical reasoning. With those values in mind, I believe that any response to the death of a black person at the hands of police with something like, “But he resisted arrest! But he had drugs! But he was wanted! But he was in a gang” is misaligned with your values and consciously held beliefs.

tl;dr don't respond to the murder of a black person by police with a justification of that action.

Do you oppose the death penalty? Do you oppose the use of capital punishment in cases of “treason, espionage, murder, large-scale drug trafficking, or attempted murder of a witness, juror, or court officer in certain cases”? Regardless of your answer, the natural conclusion in either case is that the killing of black citizens in the streets by officers of the law is nothing less than murder and needs to be responded to as such.

If you do oppose the death penalty, then you oppose condemnation of citizens to death by authorities in the most extreme circumstances, even given due process and a confirmed conviction. So how could you then justify citing resisting arrest, possession of marijuana, wanted status, or previous arrests as grounds for police brutality WITHOUT due process?

If you don't oppose the death penalty, then you believe there are circumstances that warrant a government to put a citizen to death. You must then also hold beliefs about what justifies death and what doesn't. And you must also believe in a due process to arrive at a truthful conviction to support your justification. So how can you justify dismissing charges against officers who have killed black people on cited grounds like resist, possession, or wanted status? Do those justifications meet established criteria for capital punishment like treason, large scale drug-distribution, and murder? Do snap, in the moment decisions satisfy a need for due process to condemn a person to death?

Black people are 3x more likely to be killed by police than white people, while actually 1.3x more likely to be UNARMED in the incident. Black people are over-represented while white people are under-represented in accounts of lethal use of force by police, even while posing less threat to officers. (<https://thesocietypages.org/toolbox/police-killing-of-blacks/>)

Moreover, officers don't face equal punishment for the murder of black people. In 2015, fewer than 9 of 104 cases where an unarmed black person was killed by police resulted in officers being charged with a crime without being called a mistrial or resulting in dropped charges. Of the 4 convictions in 2015, none were sentenced to serve more than 4 years in prison. (<https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/unarmed>)

George Floyd is but the most recent and well-publicized person of color to be murdered by our government. Police are doling out capital punishment sentences without due process or consequence, and have been for our entire history, including recently:

George Floyd: "Minneapolis police said Floyd resembled a suspect wanted for allegedly trying to spend a counterfeit \$20 bill in a food store and that he had resisted arrest."

Donte Hamilton: "The officers who arrived first determined that Hamilton wasn't doing anything illegal. Officer Christopher Manney showed up later and, after trying to pat Hamilton down, engaged in a struggle with him that led to the shooting. Manney was not charged."

Eric Garner: "The evidence does not support charging Police Officer Pantaleo with a federal civil rights violation." He went over the arrest step by step, maintaining the

government could not prove Officer Pantaleo willfully used excessive force to violate Mr. Garner's rights.

John Crawford: killed in a Walmart while holding an unboxed airsoft rifle. "Crawford was shot after he didn't obey the officers' commands to put the weapon down." A grand jury considered charges of murder, reckless homicide, and negligent homicide, but none were pursued.

Michael Brown: "To bring federal charges, the Justice Department needed to confirm Wilson intended to violate Brown's civil rights when he shot at him, even though he knew it was wrong to fire."

Ezell Ford:" In 2015, the Police Commission concluded that Wampler violated department policy when he fired at Ford. The board said it looked at the "totality of the circumstances" — not just the moment he fired — and faulted the officer's decision to approach and physically contact Ford. Villegas was cleared in his use of deadly force, but the panel criticized him for drawing his weapon early in the confrontation. The commission's decision overruled LAPD Chief Charlie Beck, who said he believed the officers acted within policy. "

Brandon Glenn: "LAPD police chief Charlie Beck said: 'Any time an unarmed person is shot by a Los Angeles police officer, it takes extraordinary circumstances to justify that. I have not seen those extraordinary circumstances.' No officers have been charged with a crime for killing Brandon."

If you need more convincing about the structural violence used towards black citizens by our own government, here's some reading and data:

<https://www.aclu.org/other/fighting-police-abuse-community-action-manual#gather>

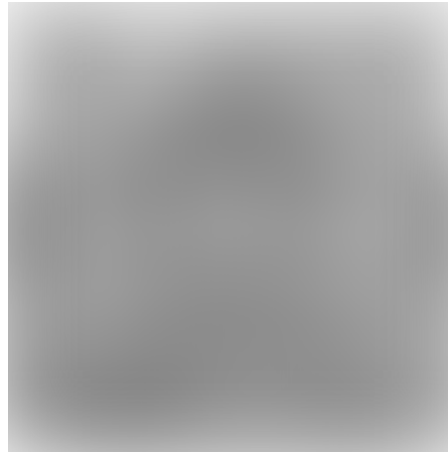
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/585152/people-shot-to-death-by-us-police-by-race/>

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/after-ferguson-black-men-and-boys-still-face-the-highest-risk-of-being-killed-by-police>

<https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/unarmed>

http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/opinions/wp/2018/09/10/report-wrongful-convictions-have-stolen-at-least-20000-years-from-innocent-defendants/?itid=lk_inline_manual_187

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/opinions/wp/2018/09/18/theres-overwhelming-evidence-that-the-criminal-justice-system-is-racist-heres-the-proof/>



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