



Anarchy in America: Shot Down Like Dogs in the Street

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By John W. Whitehead
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Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.
—William Butler Yeats, “[The Second Coming](#)”

Things are falling apart.

How much longer we can sustain the fiction that we live in a constitutional republic, I cannot say, but anarchy is being loosed upon the nation.

We are witnessing the unraveling of the American dream one injustice at a time.

Day after day, the government’s crimes against the citizenry grow more egregious, more treacherous and more tragic. And day after day, the American people wake up a little more to the grim realization that they have become captives in a prison of their own making. No longer a free people, we are now pushed and prodded and watched over by twitchy, hyper-sensitive, easily-spooked armed guards who care little for the rights, humanity or well-being of those in their care.

The death toll is mounting. The carnage is heartbreaking. The public’s faith in the government to do its job—which is to protect *our* freedoms—is deteriorating.

With [alarming regularity](#), unarmed men, women, children and even pets are being gunned down by police who shoot first and ask questions later, and all the government does is shrug and promise to do better.

Things are not getting better.

Justine Damond is dead. The 40-year-old yoga instructor was [shot and killed by Minneapolis police](#), allegedly because they were startled by a loud noise in the vicinity just as she approached their patrol car. Damond, clad in pajamas, had called 911 to report a possible assault in her neighborhood.

Ismael Lopez is dead. The 41-year-old auto mechanic was [shot and killed by Mississippi police](#) who went to the wrong address looking for a suspect in connection with an aggravated domestic violence case. Police also shot the man's dog, which had raced out of the house ahead of him.

Mary Knowlton is dead. The 73-year-old retired librarian was [shot and killed by Florida police](#) during a "shoot/don't shoot" role-playing scenario when police inadvertently used a loaded gun intended for training.

Sam DuBose is dead. The unarmed 43-year-old rapper was [shot in the head and killed by a University of Cincinnati police officer](#) during a traffic stop over a missing front license plate.

Andrew Scott is dead. Although the 26-year-old homeowner had committed no crime and never fired a single bullet or lifted his firearm against police, he was [gunned down by Florida police](#) who were investigating a speeding incident by engaging in a middle-of-the-night "knock and talk" in Scott's apartment complex.

Richard Ferretti is dead. The 52-year-old chef was [shot and killed by Philadelphia police](#) while trying to find a parking spot. Police had been alerted to investigate a purple Dodge Caravan that was driving "suspiciously" through the neighborhood.

Fritz Severe is dead. The 46-year-old homeless man was [shot five times and killed by Miami police](#) in front of more than 50 schoolchildren attending a nearby summer camp merely because he was seen holding a metal pipe.

Jordan Edwards is dead. The 15-year-old high school freshman was sitting in the passenger seat of a car driving away from a house party when Dallas police, [claiming to have heard gunshots, smashed in the window of the moving car and shot the teenager in the head](#). Edwards' two brothers, also in the car, watched him die. No weapons were found.

Charleena Lyles is dead. The pregnant, 30-year-old mother of four had called the police to report a stolen Xbox video game unit. She was [shot and killed by Seattle police](#) after they arrived at her home to find her holding a knife.

In every one of these scenarios, police *could* have resorted to less lethal tactics.

They *could* have acted with reason and calculation instead of reacting with a killer instinct.

They *could* have attempted to de-escalate and defuse whatever perceived "threat" caused them to fear for their lives enough to react with lethal force.

That police instead chose to fatally resolve these encounters by using their guns on fellow citizens speaks volumes about what is wrong with policing in America today, where police officers are being dressed in the trappings of war, drilled in the deadly art of combat, and trained to look upon "every individual they interact with as an armed threat and [every situation as a deadly force encounter in the making](#)."

Remember, to a hammer, all the world looks like a nail.

We're not just getting hammered, however.

We're getting killed, execution-style.

It no longer matters whether you're innocent of any wrongdoing or guilty as sin: when you're dealing with police who shoot first and ask questions later, due process—the constitutional assurance of a fair trial before an impartial jury—means nothing.

All the individuals who have been shot and killed by police—fired at three and four and five times in a split second—have already been tried, found guilty and sentenced to death. And in that split second of deciding whether to shoot and where to aim, the nation's police officers have appointed themselves judge, jury and executioner over their fellow citizens.

In this way, we're seen as nothing more than animals and treated as such.

In fact, we're being gunned down like dogs.

Consider that a dog is shot by a police officer "[every 98 minutes.](#)"

The Department of Justice estimates that at least [25 dogs are killed by police every day.](#)

[Spike, a 70-pound pit bull, was shot by NYPD police](#) when they encountered him in the hallway of an apartment building in the Bronx. Surveillance footage shows the dog, tail wagging, right before an officer shot him in the head at pointblank range.

[Arzy, a 14-month-old Newfoundland, Labrador and golden retriever mix, was shot between the eyes](#) by a Louisiana police officer. The dog had been secured on a four-foot leash at the time he was shot. An independent witness testified that the dog never gave the officer any provocation to shoot him.

[Seven, a St. Bernard, was shot repeatedly by Connecticut police](#) in the presence of the dog's 12-year-old owner. Police, investigating an erroneous tip, had entered the property—without a warrant—where the dog and her owner had been playing in the backyard, causing the dog to give chase.

[Dutchess, a 2-year-old rescue dog, was shot three times in the head by Florida police](#) as she ran out her front door. The officer had been approaching the house to inform the residents that their car door was open when the dog bounded out to greet him.

[Yanna, a 10-year-old boxer, was shot three times by Georgia police](#) after they mistakenly entered the wrong home and opened fire, killing the dog, shooting the homeowner in the leg and wounding an investigating officer.

Here's the point: when you train police to shoot first and ask questions later—whether it's a family pet, a child with a toy gun, or an old man with a cane—they're going to shoot to kill.

This is the fallout from teaching police to assume the worst-case scenario and react with fear to anything that poses the slightest threat (imagined or real). This is what comes from teaching police to view themselves as soldiers on a battlefield and those they're supposed to serve as enemy combatants. This is the end result of a lopsided criminal justice system that fails to hold the government and its agents accountable for misconduct.

Whether you're talking about police shooting dogs or citizens, the [mindset is the same](#): a rush to violence, abuse of power, fear for officer safety, poor training in how to de-escalate a situation, and general carelessness.

This is the same mindset that sees nothing wrong with American citizens being subjected to roadside strip searches, forcible blood draws, invasive surveillance, secret government experiments, and other morally reprehensible tactics.

Unfortunately, this is a mindset that is flourishing within the corporate-controlled, military-driven American police state.

So what's to be done about all of this?

Essentially, it comes down to training and accountability.

It's the difference 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. It's the difference between police who are trained to shoot to kill and police trained to resolve situations peacefully. Most of all, it's the difference 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.

As a result, we're approaching a breaking point.

This policing crisis is far more immediate and concerning than the government's so-called war on terror or drugs.

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

It's a tug-of-war between the constitutional republic America's founders intended and the police state we are fast becoming.

So how do we fix what's broken, stop the senseless shootings and bring about lasting reform?

For starters, stop with the scare tactics. In much the same way that American citizens are being cocooned in a climate of fear by a government that knows exactly which buttons to push in order to gain the public's cooperation and compliance, police officers are also being [indoctrinated with the psychology of fear](#). Despite the propaganda being peddled by the government and police unions, [police today experience less on-the-job fatalities](#) than they ever have historically.

Second, level the playing field. Police lives are no more valuable than any other citizen's. Whether or not they wield a gun, police officers are public servants like all other government officials, which means that they work for us. While police are entitled to every protection afforded under the law, the same as any other citizen, [they should not be afforded any special privileges](#). They certainly should not be shielded from accountability for misconduct by the courts and the legislatures.

Third, require that police officers be trained in non-lethal tactics. According to the *New York Times*, the training regimens at nearly all of the nation's police academies continue to emphasize military-style exercises, with the average young officer made to undergo 58 hours of firearms training and 49 hours of defensive tactical training, but [only eight hours of de-escalation training](#). If police officers are taking classes in how to shoot, maim and kill, shouldn't they also be trained in non-lethal force, crisis intervention training on how to deal with the mentally ill, de-escalation techniques to use the lowest level of force possible when responding to a threat, and how to respect their fellow citizens' constitutional rights?

Fourth, ditch the quasi-military obsession. Police forces were never intended to be standing armies. Yet with police agencies dressing like the military in camouflage and armor, training with the military, using military weapons, riding around in armored vehicles, recruiting military veterans, and even boasting military titles, one would be [hard pressed to distinguish between the two](#). Still, it's our job to make sure that we can distinguish between the two, and that means keeping the police in their place as civilians—non-military citizens—who are entrusted with protecting *our* rights.

Fifth, demilitarize. There are many examples of [countries where police are not armed and dangerous](#), and they are no worse off for it. Indeed, their crime rates are low and their police officers are trained to view every citizen as precious.

Sixth, stop making taxpayers pay for police abuses. Some communities are trying to [require police to carry their own professional liability insurance](#). The logic is that if police had to pay out of pocket for their own wrongdoing, they might be more cautious and less inclined to shoot first and ask questions later.

Seventh, support due process for everyone, not just the people in your circle. Remember that you no longer have to be poor, black or guilty to be treated like a criminal in America. All that is required is that you belong to the suspect class—a.k.a. the citizenry—of the American police

state. As a *de facto* member of this so-called criminal class, every U.S. citizen is now guilty until proven innocent.

You could be the next person who gets shot by a police officer for moving the wrong way during a traffic stop, running the wrong way in the vicinity of a police officer, or defending yourself against a home invasion when the [police show up at the wrong address](#) in the middle of the night.

People have been wrongfully shot and killed for these exact reasons.

Yet as I point out in my book [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#), there can be no justice in America when Americans are being killed, detained and robbed at gunpoint by government officials on the mere suspicion of wrongdoing.

Unfortunately, Americans have been so propagandized, politicized and polarized that many feel compelled to choose sides between defending the police at all costs or painting them as dangerously out-of-control.

Nothing is ever that black and white, but there are a few things that we can be sure of: America should not be a battlefield.

Police officers are not soldiers.

And “We the People: are not the enemy.

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