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Until the Cops Come Knocking

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Until the Cops Come Knocking

Abstract

“Fuck the police coming straight from the underground/ A young nigga got it bad ‘cause I’m brown/ And not the other color so police think/ They have the authority to kill a minority” – Ice Cube, “Fuck Tha Police”

At some point in our lives, we have all walked down a street for some minute errand, and a few of those times we may have crossed paths with men in uniform patrolling the streets. Some who cross them may not think anything of it, but for others, they feel their eyes follow every step they take and distaste is exchanged in the stares they give each other. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, race, ethnicity, racism, bias, racial profiling, African American, racial crime

Disciplines

Criminology | Inequality and Stratification | Politics and Social Change | Race and Ethnicity | Social Control, Law, Crime, and Deviance | Sociology

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](https://www.gettysburg.edu) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that -isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

UNTIL THE COPS COME KNOCKING

July 22, 2013

"Fuck the police coming straight from the underground/ A young nigga got it bad 'cause I'm brown/ And not the other color so police think/ They have the authority to kill a minority"
– Ice Cube, "Fuck Tha Police"

At some point in our lives, we have all walked down a street for some minute errand, and a few of those times we may have crossed paths with men in uniform patrolling the streets. Some who cross them may not think anything of it, but for others, they feel their eyes follow every step they take and distaste is exchanged in the stares they give each other.



Our nation has recently revived interest in racial profiling through various high profile-court cases, exposing gaping flaws in our justice system. A lesser known example is [Tremaine McMillian](#), a 14 year-old boy from Miami who was tackled to the ground by police officers because of his "dehumanizing stares." The boy was squeezed so hard that he urinated himself, the puppy he was walking injured his paw when pulled away from McMillian, and he subsequently faced a felony resisting arrest charge. The charges were dropped on July 16th.

As heartbreaking as this story is, I was not in the least surprised. For as long as I can remember, the mentality many minorities have about the police department, or any law enforcement agency, is that they are there to "protect and to serve," if you are white, that is. If you are born with any pigment in your skin, you are also born with a target on your back. Hunting season is year-round, and we aren't born with wings strong enough to fly away and escape.

Before anyone accuses me of police bashing, I would like it to be known that I have the upmost respect for the work of a police officer. They are people who willingly put their lives on the line every day in order to uphold safety and order. Police officers must deal with dangerous situations that require quick decision-making where oftentimes the stakes are life or death. Where the lines are grey, they have to dig into their own pallets and draw up their own solutions in the worst pictured scenarios. In these situations, officers sometimes see traumatic outcomes that they have to live with for the rest of their lives, or they lose their own lives. Therefore, I salute them.

But at the same time, the badge that is *supposed* to command this respect from everyone is often feared and hated in the communities that need them the most. The looks we get when they drive by a group of us, the attitude we're treated with when interacting with them, and the numerous instances of brutality and mistreatment that still continue to this day force our communities into a state of mistrust and anger. To add to the powder keg, the times we *do* decide to contact law enforcement for aid, they are often slow to respond or act with little concern when addressing our problems. In our minds, the fact is the police do not like us; therefore we do not like them. They do not respect us; therefore we do not respect them.

The distrust is especially apparent when people are continuously stopped for "driving/walking while Black/Brown," a common offense that we cannot be tried for but are harassed for nonetheless. It is impossible to feel like more than a second rate citizen if you cannot even live in a place or walk down the street without having your motives questioned or raising suspicion. Even at Gettysburg College, I have been asked to provide identification when I was in an academic building after hours with a fellow Latino male as we were just sitting in one of the rooms eating snacks. We peeked out the windows and notice there are other students in building, but they are not asked for their ID cards. The only difference between them and us was that they were white students. The same has been asked of several of my peers, who were doing nothing more than walking the campus at night.

Then, of course, there are the ever popular Stop and Frisk laws in New York and other cities, which allow police officers to stop anyone they feel is suspicious and search their person. New Yorkers were stopped over half a million times in 2012, 89% were innocent infractions. Of those stopped, [87% were Black and Latino](#). As the data suggests, Stop and Frisk essentially encourages racial profiling and makes it nearly impossible to walk to the corner without being considered a suspect in a crime that has yet to occur. To make matter worse, it has been reported that in these stops, whites were about 25% more likely than Latinos and almost twice as likely as Blacks to be found with a weapon on their person. The [disparity with drugs](#) is equally as surprising.

This profiling extends past the watchful eye of the police officers. We often enter stores to have employees watching our every move. We cannot walk down the street without people looking back after we've passed them or women clutching their purses. When I worked in retail, I was *actually told* to keep a closer eye on black and Latino customers, especially those who wore hoodies, sagging pants, fitted caps, snapbacks, etc. No matter where we go, there's a pretty good chance we'll be followed, whether by eyes or bodies. Dark skin is a red flag, and it is one countless lives have paid a hefty price for (I think we can all think of a current event or two to go along with this.)

But the blame cannot fall solely on those in uniform, especially when the very laws they are enforcing state that particular groups must have special surveillance. In Arizona, the Supreme Court ruled to uphold SB 1070 section 2(b), which is also known as the ["show me your papers" law](#). Police can stop whoever they believe could be an undocumented individual and demand proof of their immigration status. In essence, anyone with brown skin can be stopped and questioned at any moment, destroying any piece of mind we may have. How can my, or any, parents explain to my younger brother, or any children that look like him, that they are afraid to let them play outside because they may be treated like criminals for no reason and have their innocence prosecuted.

While many people claim the "race card" is overplayed, there is no denying that police misconduct is very much real and prevalent. A 14 year old walking a puppy can't even walk down the street without being accused of causing problems, so how can *any* of our children feel safe walking these streets. With all of the issues our people face on a daily basis, why are we *afraid* of those who are supposed to *protect* us? How can I entrust my safety to those who would just as quick bash my skull in as the crew on the corner? As much as I respect the courage that the profession requires, I cannot respect those in uniform who will not look at my life as being worth the same amount of protection as that of a white person. My skin may be considerably lighter than my father's, but I feel the

same fear and anger as he does. I feel the same “guilty until proven innocent” prejudice that he does. People wonder why, 15 years later, the words of N.W.A. still come through our car stereos and headphones, or why we still spell out “AmeriKKKA” like Ice Cube did on his first album. Until I die, or some serious reflection happens, I will be saying, “fuck the police,” and so will most of my people.

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<http://surgegettyburg.wordpress.com/2013/07/22/until-the-cops-come-knocking/>