

Justice Department Interventions Will Not Halt Police Violence Across America

Numerous cities have been under consent decrees but brutality continues

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Global Research, December 09, 2014

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

Over the last several years a number of police departments with histories of using lethal force against oppressed peoples have been subjected to civil rights investigations and consent decrees with the Justice Department.

Nonetheless, violence by the police against the people has continued and even worsened. The recent public slayings of Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice and others have illustrated clearly that the United States government is incapable of reining in local law-enforcement agencies.

In fact the escalation in the militarization of the police is being facilitated by the Department of Defense which is supplying lethal weapons, body gear, and armored vehicles to cities throughout the country.

When the Obama administration called for the use of cameras by police officers during a summit at the White House on Dec. 1 it was already superfluous. That same week a grand jury in New York decided not to indict even one police officer under investigation in the choking death of African American Eric Garner in Staten Island.

The killing of Eric Garner was videotaped and yet the police involved in the fatal attack—as well the emergency medical technicians who refused to provide life-saving assistance to Garner—were not indicted or disciplined by the prosecutor's office or the City of New York. The current Mayor Bill de Blasio of New York, who was framed as a liberal and progressive during his campaign in 2013, appointed William J. Bratton, one of the architects of the “stop and frisk” and “broken windows” theory of policing as the chief law-enforcement commander.

Detroit Was Under Two Federal Consent Decrees for 11 Years

The City of Detroit is a clear example of the systematic failure of the Justice Department and the federal courts to eliminate police misconduct and brutality. Since the Great Migration of African Americans and the rise of the labor movement during the 20th century, the history of police suppression of the people has become well enshrined in the political fabric of the Motor City.

In July 1967 amid deteriorating conditions involving residential segregation, institutional racism and police brutality, the masses of African Americans rose up in the largest urban rebellion in the history of the U.S. up until that time. After the rebellion police repression

escalated with the expansion of the tactical mobile units and eventually the dreaded decoy unit known as STRESS (Stop the Robberies Enjoy Safe Streets), which was responsible for the police killings of 33 people during 1971-73.

Beginning in 2000, amid a series of cop killings of civilians, the Justice Department Civil Rights Division began a three year investigation. In 2003, the Justice Department entered into a consent judgment with Detroit leading to 11 years of monitoring by several private firms overseen by a federal judge. These actions did not lead to an immediate decline in police violence.

The police killing of civilians continued and even intensified while the federal monitoring was taking place. Tens of millions of local tax dollars were turned over to private monitors who abused the funds without recommending the termination or prosecution of any of the officers who were carrying out these killings and other acts of brutality.

On May 16, 2010, a police raid at the wrong address resulted in the shooting death of seven-year-old Aiyana Jones on the city's eastside. By this time the City of Detroit had been under two federal consent decrees for seven years involving the use of lethal force and the deplorable conditions existing in the lock-ups.

It was only due to public pressure that the white cop, Joseph Weekley, was indicted on charges of involuntary manslaughter and reckless discharge of a firearm. However, after two trials there has been no conviction of Weekly who remains free and on the City of Detroit payroll.

The discharge from the consent decrees was only able to take place under emergency management and forced bankruptcy during 2014. A much talked about Board of Police Commissioners has been stripped of the limited authority that it had since its creation under the City Charter of 1974 enacted at the same time as the first African American Mayor Coleman A. Young came into office. The Commission largely served as a venue for the filing of complaints about police misconduct where virtually no disciplinary actions were taken.

Only Mass Struggle and Revolutionary Organization Can End Police Terrorism

Other cities such as Cleveland are now under yet another of such consent decrees. Cleveland had been under federal monitoring before and even with the announcement of the new consent judgment by Attorney General Eric Holder, no police have been arrested or indicted in the recent killing of 12-year-old Tamir Rice, who was playing with a toy gun in a public park when he was gunned down by the police.

Cincinnati, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and numerous municipalities have experienced similar situations of federal involvement which have not halted the misconduct and brutality. Objectively through its policies, the White House, the Pentagon along with the courts from the federal level down to the local judicial systems, categorically defend police officers in situations related to violence against African Americans, Latinos and others.

It has only been the rebellions and mass demonstrations that have pushed the question of police violence against the people to the forefront of political discussions inside the U.S. If people had not gone out and militantly demonstrated against the blatant killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, these issues would not have even been acknowledged by the government and the corporate media.

Police agencies operating under the U.S. capitalist system function exclusively on behalf of the corporations and the repressive state. In order to eliminate police misconduct and brutality it is necessary to transform the state apparatus through the transfer of wealth from the ruling class to the workers and the oppressed.

This can only be carried out as a result of the seizure of political power by the majority within society. Decades of “reforms” through “training programs” and federal investigations have not changed the situation in the least.

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