
History and reasons behind police brutality (against African Americans)

For many Americans, the presence of the police and the work of the justice system is that of security, safety and order; an authority provided by the government set to protect the people of its country. However, for a significant amount of American people this is the opposite; for them the police are a source of fear and discrimination.

Police brutality is not a new nor an isolated problem in America and has in fact had a significant presence in the lives of African- Americans and people of colour in America since the beginning of modern American policing.

Modern American policing, as we know it today, evolved into an organized institution in the 1830s and '40s when northern American cities decided that they needed better control over the fast-growing urban populations. At first, the communities most targeted by violent and harsh police behaviour were European immigrants such as Jewish and Irish immigrants but, as African- Americans fled the Jim Crow segregation laws in the south, they too became the victims of brutal American policing in the northern cities where they sought refuge.

By definition, police brutality is the excessive use of physical or verbal assault during police interrogations, arrests and any other form of handlings. It is important to note that deadly force is not always excessive force although, if the deadly force used is disproportional to the force necessary, it is considered police brutality.

Historically, individuals in lower socio-economic levels, who live in lower socio-economic neighbourhoods and socially marginalized individuals have been targeted by police brutality.

Furthermore, police brutality has often been and is still motivated by racial stereotypes. Perhaps contributed to by the systematic racism often replicated in the media, many American law enforcement officers may believe that African- Americans, immigrants and people of colour are more likely to be violent than their white or lighter skinned counterparts. It is commonly agreed that policemen and law enforcement officers are often concerned about their safety whilst working and therefore, with this pre-perceived opinion on a particular individual, the policeman may be even more anxious when confronting them. This could push them to be more readily violent in their police procedure or handling. These stereotypes are rooted in the shameful history of enslavement and segregation.