

## Racism In America... *The Policing Issue*

By Matthew Hattley



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Does racism actually exist in America? Yes, unfortunately, it absolutely does. Specifically where poverty-stricken people of color are concerned. One way this shows up very clearly is in the debate over police violence. Although top-ranking law enforcement officials often state that racism does not play a role and that their officers' ways of doing their job is just misunderstood, there really is no logical explanation for why so many African American males are first targeted, then often abused, subjected to police brutality, or just murdered out of hand, often quite casually. These killings have been going on for decades, even centuries, and cover-up has been the usual response with no action taken. That now is changing. Because of the spread of cameras on smart phones out there (we do not have them in here!), a lot of undeniable evidence has been produced. See the indictment this week for murder of officer Michael Slager, in South Carolina, who shot Walter Scott five times in the back as he ran away from a traffic stop. Walter Scott was black; Slager is white.

For racism to exist, one group must believe that they are superior to another. This unhealthy way of thinking must end.

And the video-taping continues by average citizens and it spreads over the internet on social media and it's just impossible now to ignore these situations, which occur almost daily.

In essence, all the blatant lies about police brutality towards minority groups are being unveiled like never before; there's no longer any place to hide. If there were no video evidence, then we know that all of these situations would simply be swept under the rug and accusations of brutality or murder would be deemed meritless or fabricated. That's how things have been for, like, ever. And still very few are being held accountable. How is this even possible in 2015?

So today when the truth is revealed, law enforcement officials hold a press conference and say it was an "isolated incident" or a "lack of judgment" on the officer's behalf. In fact they're just sorry they got caught and exposed; it's embarrassing. And then the officers that have been caught or exposed are hardly ever punished. Perhaps they get a reprimand, perhaps they lose vacation days, and if it goes to a jury, well... we've seen juries refuse to indict or convict. The indictment of Officer Slager was unusual. We'll have to see how that case plays out.

Of course the first step towards addressing this problem is to admit that it exists. Only then can a comprehensive training program be created and implemented to ensure that every citizen, regardless of race, color or creed, will be treated equally. For such a program to be effective, officers will have to be re-trained on how to interact with those not of their own race. And since racism is a taught behavior, we are not born hating people with other skin colors; this is something we learn as youngsters. I think we can be sure that the brutality we've seen used against African Americans would never have been tolerated if it was applied to everyone that interacted with the police.

Of course, everyone is entitled to their own views and beliefs, and that can include some pretty terrible opinions of others. However, when you work for an agency, which has public safety as its primary objective, then your personal views are void. You are expected to conduct yourself in a professional manner at all times. And unfortunately in too many police departments across the country there exists a culture that protects individual officers who may act recklessly, may even kill someone while in uniform. It's time for those in law enforcement to be totally honest with the citizens of America, so we as a nation can finally correct this problem and move forward productively. The healing process will require a lot of hard work, I know, and it will take dedication and money (training is not free). Most importantly, it will take trust from everyone to make it happen.

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