

**Josh Hartman**

## **Police Brutality in America**

In 1619, a Dutch ship brought over 20 African slaves to the British Colony of Jamestown, Virginia. Little did people know, these Dutch sailors changed North America even to this day. Throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century, European settlers realized that African Americans slaves were a much cheaper form of labor than indentured servants. These slaves were used by nearly everyone in the South and they turned into a necessity for the farmers. Eventually, on December 18, 1865, the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment was approved which officially abolished slavery. Although it seemed like this would end racism, it was far from over. Even to this day, racism is a huge issue and has now been put back in the spotlight. Many cases are occurring involving policemen who are unfairly beating or even killing many African Americans. Although, policemen have the right to use “reasonable force” to take a person into custody, they often cross the line when it comes to arresting blacks. Unarmed black men and even kids are often shot to death by the police. Blacks are often given much longer sentences than white people, and these white officers are often let off the hook and not given a sentence. Therefore, Police Brutality against black people is a huge topic.



**Source: Andy Marlette, “Our Sad Reality” 2015.**

This political cartoon was created after the unfair death of Michael Brown Jr. in Ferguson Missouri. On August 9, 2014, Darren Wilson, a white police officer, shot and killed Michael Brown Jr., an unarmed black teenager. Michael Brown was gunned down after he stole cigarettes from a local convenience store. Brown fled when Officer Darren Wilson fired his gun at him. After being chased down, Brown confronted the officer unarmed and with his hands in the air, however Wilson fired shots and killed Brown. In the picture an African American father and son are hugging and crying after reading the morning newspaper which said that another black man was shot. The word “another” in the newspaper headline emphasizes that these shooting are recurring throughout the United States. Also their facial expressions along with their thought bubbles which state, “I worry so much about him...” show that black people in this society are worried that they might be the next one shot. By having a young child, who typically never pays attention to the news or has many worries, worry about his father being shot shows that this is becoming a huge issue to not only adults but black families as a whole. The author is trying to

show that black people are forced to have to worry about themselves and loved ones being shot down by police officers even if they are unarmed. Black families especially children should not have to worry about whether or not they are going to be shot and killed. <sup>1</sup>



**Source: George Holiday, 1991.**

This picture was taken during the famous beating of Rodney King by four white male police officers in Los Angeles. On April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1965 Rodney King was caught by the Los Angeles police after a high-speed chase. The officers pulled him out of his car and brutally beat him while cameraman George Holiday caught the whole thing on tape. After a three-month trial, a predominantly white jury acquitted the officers which led to huge riots in Los Angeles. The picture shows the four police officers brutally beating up Rodney King after they pulled him out of their car. One of the officers is beating King with his baton while another officer is seen kicking him. Rodney King is simply laying on the ground while the officers are beating him up because he does not have the power to fight back. Other officers are in the back just watching while the beating occurs. The author is trying to show how cruel the police officers have been

---

<sup>1</sup> "What Happened in Ferguson?" *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 13 Aug. 2014, [www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/08/13/us/ferguson-missouri-town-under-siege-after-police-shooting.html](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/08/13/us/ferguson-missouri-town-under-siege-after-police-shooting.html).

<sup>2</sup> "Rodney King." *Biography.com*, A&E Networks Television, 5 Mar. 2018, [www.biography.com/people/rodney-king-9542141](http://www.biography.com/people/rodney-king-9542141).

treating blacks in america. They are continually beating blacks for unfair reasons when they could have just stopped at putting him in handcuffs. Also, this is evidence that the police officers did brutally beat the man yet they were still let off the hook. White officers should not be let off the hook for unfairly beating blacks while the blacks still have to face time.



**Source: Jason Kandel, 1992.**

This photograph<sup>3</sup> was taken following the famous acquittal of the four Los Angeles Police Department officers who were videotaped beating Rodney King following a high speed pursuit. After the white police officers were let off the hook, riots began to break out. During the riots, more than 50 people were killed, more than 2,000 were injured and 9,500 were arrested for robbery and arson, resulting in \$1 billion in property damage. These riots lasted for three days and eventually caused two of the officers to be convicted. In the picture the prominently black crowd in the back are shown in a parking lot of a shopping store. The police officers as well as the shopping carts are lined up against the wall of the shopping store to stop the crowd from breaking in and destroying the store. The police officers have helmets on and some even have

---

<sup>3</sup> "Riots Erupt in Los Angeles." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, [www.history.com/this-day-in-history/riots-erupt-in-los-angeles](http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/riots-erupt-in-los-angeles).

their batons out which shows that they are ready in case violence ensues. In the background there is smoke coming from downtown Los Angeles which shows just how chaotic these riots really were. It shouldn't have to take three days of riots, people's lives, and billions of dollars in property damage for white officers who unreasonably beat up a black man.



**Source: Clay Jones, 2015.**

This picture was created recently because all of the black rights specifically in Texas are being questioned by white supremacists. These white supremacists believe that blacks still should not have the right to vote and even some police officers have been arresting blacks that have attempted to vote. In the picture, Once police officer is seen tackling a black woman who was stripped of all her clothes except for her underwear. The officer has pulled his gun and says that he arrested her because he, "...thought she was trying to vote..." The other police officer is looking on while holding a sign that says, "Texas Voting Rights". The black woman looks completely harmless, however the police officer felt the need to tackle her, strip off all her clothes, and pull out his gun. The artist is trying to show how white police officers have been arresting blacks for very little to no reason except for the fact that they are black. Also, police

officers feel the need to use reasonable force such as tackling blacks, stripping them of their clothes and pulling their guns. There should not still be racism and questioning of whether blacks should vote over a century after they were given that right.



**Source: Clay Jones, "Shot in Cleveland" 2014.**

This document was created during the 2000s when many black people including children were gunned down while being unarmed. A famous example of police shooting unarmed children is Trayvon Martin. George Zimmerman, the neighborhood crime watch in Sanford, Florida on February 26 2012 fatally shot and killed 17 year old Trayvon Martin. It was later found out that Trayvon was completely unarmed and was racially profiled since he had his hood on. As seen in the picture two police officers have pulled out their guns while one screams "Drop the weapon". They are pointing their gun at a harmless baby simply playing with her cradle while her mother wants on. The artist is trying to show how police officers feel the need to pull their guns on blacks specifically kids who are completely unharmed or harmless. Shooting

should not be the first option in any situation especially in the case of an unarmed or harmless person.

Recently police brutality has been an increasing issue in society. Police officers often shoot and kill unarmed and harmless adults and even children. Often whites are given lighter sentences if sentences at all than blacks. Even the officers who brutally beat or kill blacks are often let off the hook. These issues were even happening during the reconstruction era. The Jim Crow laws were a set of laws that segregated against black people during the late 19th century. These laws would restrict which bathrooms blacks could use, which restaurants they could use, and even which schools they could attend. Often white people including cops would arrest, beat up, and even kill blacks for no reason, except for their race. Even years later, cops are still arresting, beating up, and killing blacks, however there are no laws that allow them to do so. Even though there are no laws allowing this police brutality to happen, it still occurs and is very common. After years and years since slaves were set free, blacks are still mistreated and discriminated against especially by police officers.