A Brief History of American Police Brutality

There are riots and protests in every major city in the United States. Two Black Americans, George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, were brutally murdered by police in three months. Their stories are only episodes in a horrifying yet complex history of police brutality--a history of violence, reform, riots, and militarization. While the mainstream media presents police brutality as isolated incidents, the deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd do not exist in a vacuum--they are a continuation of this history. This timeline attempts to show that: (a) Police brutality is a human rights abuse that has drawn the attention of international organizations including the United Nations and Amnesty International. The prevalence of police brutality means that the United States is an authoritarian society; (b) Police are becoming increasingly militarized. As police departments turn into municipal armed forces, police violence becomes more frequent; (c) Police departments are a continuation of slave patrols; And (d) local reforms and organized activism (including riots) are the most effective means of curtailing police abuse. The federal government and self-regulated police will only further militarize policing.

Militarization of police

South Carolina establishes the first slave

patrols in areas where Black slaves outnumber Whites. Slave patrols are considered by many contemporary scholars and activists to be forerunners of contemporary police departments.

Robber Baron Jay Gould brags that he could get one

half of the working class (the police) to kill the other (his own workers). He said this at the height of the Progressive Era, when police violently dispersed strikes. President Richard

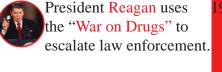
Nixon introduces the term "War on Drugs."



Supreme Court makes it harder to take legal action in cases of police brutality in its ruling for Rizzo v Goode.



sworn in as president.



Supreme Court rules that choke holds are constitutional with City of Los Angeles v

The police union organized racially charged demonstrations

against Mayor Dinkins. Mayoral candidate Rudy Giuliani supports the protests and blames Dinkins for low morale in the police force.



to train police departments in urban warfare.

US Army begins

Mayor Giuliani reforms the NYPD with the Zero Tolerance policy to further separate the police from other social services, and to

further enlarge the police force. While Zero Tolerance did successfully reduce crime in the city, it propagated the militarization of the NYPD.

Whren v US allows officers to make "pretext stops," meaning they may stop and frisk suspects under the pretext of a smaller offence, even if they intend to pursue a more serious offence.

Yorkers stopped and frisked. 82-90% had not committed an offense, and only 9-12% were White. Because stop and frisks were relentless and mostly without cause, the practice was a form of

5 million New

psychological violence.



Mississippi and

South Carolina

patrols with police

slaves committed

they were treated

as serious crimes

Supreme Court case

the scope of police

life. Police may now

arrest based on "rea-

sonable suspicion"--a

much lower standard

than "probable cause."

Supreme Court

City of New

rules in Lewis v

Orleans that it is

illegal to curse at

a police officer,

and in many cases

to even criticize a

Against the Posse

Comitatus Act (see

ments were given

access to military

Armed Forces, as

part of the War on

equipment and

training by the

1989 Supreme Court rules

in Graham v Connor

deadly force with the

standard of "objective

reasonableness." This

court case is used to

justify fatal on-duty

shootings by police

officers to this day.

However, police are

held liable under the

excessive force.

Department of

Defense begins

military equip-

The Supreme Court

rules in the Illinois v

from a police car is

suspicious behavior

that justifies a stop

The US Bureau of

by on-duty police

police departments

by their officers or

simply declined to

2016FBI director James

Comey says that

"Americans actually

have no idea" about

how frequent police

violence is because

of inadequate data

2018 Trump administration

stalls US DOJ plans to

quantitatively track police

collection.

violence.

survey.

Justice Statistics (BJS)

stopped collecting data

on murders committed

officers because many

don't keep statistics on

homicides committed

participate in the BJS

and frisk.

Wardlow that running

giving police

departments

ment and

technology.

that police may use

1878), police depart-

police officer.

replace slave

departments.

When former

petty offences,

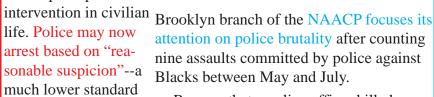
for the military to perform law enforcement duties in an attempt to clarify the duties of the Armed Forces and those of police departments.

Curran Commission investigates violence and corruption within the NYPD.

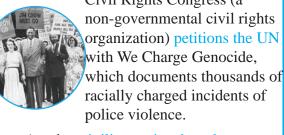


A riot in Harlem results in Mayor Fiorello La Guardia forming a commission to understand police brutality. The commission criticizes the over-policing of Harlem.

from using physical coercion Terry v Ohio increases in Brown v Mississippi.

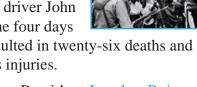


Black woman in Harlem result in public hearings on police brutality and an advisory committee to investigate police brutality complaints in Harlem.



Another civilian review board was proposed in the New York City Council because the police were incapable of regulating themselves. The attempt was unsuccessful.

Riots in Newark after police officers beat black cab driver John Smith. The four days



Johnson starts the Kerner Commission to investigate the causes of the riots of the 1960s. The Commission found that

political agendas most efficiently during riots and times of political

of a Black school teacher during a drug raid at the wrong house. The Miami Herald found that on average, three brutality complaints were filed against police each Constitution for use of

> US Commission on Civil Rights documents Houston and Philadelphia police, finding that complaints of police brutality are usually ignored within police bureaucracies.

David Dinkins, the first Black Mayor of New York, establishes a program of community policing called "Safe Streets, Safe City."

force and even after-school centers. Crime rates dropped within a year.

Mayor Dinkins appoints the Mollen Commission to investigate allegations of police brutality and other crimes within the NYPD.

American chief (Willie between police and the Black community. 1995

polls find that two thirds of Los Angeles residents approved his reforms--including 80% of African Americans.

President Bill Clinton enacts the Violence Control and Law Enforcement Act to increase federal aid to local and state police departments. The act also gives the Justice Department more investigative and prosecutorial authority over instances of police violence, and that the department must collect statistics on police brutality.



hearings, Mollen Commission releases a highly critical report on police misconduct in New York. Their conclusion is the

opposite of the Knapp Commission (1973): most officers are meat-eaters. Justice Department launches a "Pattern of 2011 Abuse" probe in the Miami police department because of repeated incidents of police brutality. The 2013 report shows that the department committed a number of racially charged shootings.

> Attorney General Loretta Lynch begins an investigation of the Chicago police department after shooting of a Black teenager.

Attempts at reform

Posse Comitatus Act makes it a felony

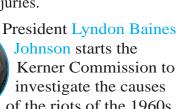


Supreme Court bans police

Rumors that a police officer killed a

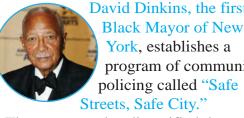
Civil Rights Congress (a

of riot resulted in twenty-six deaths and numerous injuries.



Black Americans propagated their

Riots in Miami. Police break into the home 1980

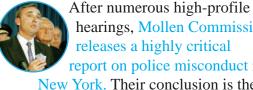


The program also diversified the police

LAPD appoints an African



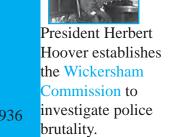
Williams) who promised to improve relationships



the perceived cover-up of the fatal

Commission investigates Clubber Williams, a

> captain of a precinct in New York, who retired with a suspiciously exorbitant net worth.



Riot in Harlem.

1943

refuses to establish a monitoring agency.

Mayor La Guardia

investigates rogue NYPD cop Jimmy Reardon.

Gross Commission

1965 Angeles police brutality and systematic social inequalities.



investigates violence and corruption within the NYPD. They distinguish between 'grass-eaters" (officers who engage in acts of petty corruption) and "meat-eaters" (officers who commit more grave offences, including acts of violence). Most officers were found to

1985 The Supreme Court rules in Tennessee v Garner that deadly police violence is prohibited by the Constitution The appellant was the father of Edward Garner, a Black teenager who was shot in the back of the head by police in

be "grass-eaters."

Memphis. 1991 Democrats attempt to pass legislation to criminalize police brutality and reform policing in response to the Rodney King beatings. The Bush administration and police unions sabotage

these attempts. 1993 Against the NYPD and

wishes of the police unions,

Dinkins lost his 1993 Jonie Pratt, a Black schoolteacher, beat mayoral election to Giuliani. Once mayor, by New Orleans police officers during a Giuliani made the reviewtraffic stop.

board ineffective. 1998 Amnesty International concludes that African victims of most incidents into her home.

government agency)

concludes that police

since a previous 1981

at reform and national

administration supports

well as initiatives to

track police violence.

police body cameras, as 🎉

attention brought by

the Rodney King

beatings.

Obama's

2015 President

report, despite attempts

brutality increased

of police brutality. The Michael Brown shot by report was a response to police in Ferguson, Missouri brings national attention to the beatings of Abner police violence. Black Lives Matter, founded in 2013, becomes larger 2000 U.S. Civil Rights and more active. Commission (an independent, bipartisan

chokehold by police officers in Staten Island. The videotaped incident draws more attention to police brutality.

police in Baltimore. 12-year-old Tamir Rice shot by police in Cleveland who believed his toy gun was real. Alton Sterling (Baton Rouge)

and Philando Castile (Minnesota) shot by police in two separate incidents in a period of two days.

Incidents of police brutality

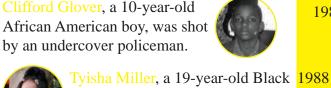
1963

Elbert Dukes, a nine year old, struck in 1955 the face by a police officer in New York. Ben Fields, a Harlem resident, shot by a police officer who saw Fields with a large sum of money which he then took. The officer then punched Fields, slammed him against a wall, and shot him in the stomach. Fields was para-



Police assault protesters 1965 marching from Selma to attack Black teenagers during Martin Luther

New Orleans police (with the assistance of 1973 two officers from San Francisco) torture the who allegedly killed a police officer in San Francisco. Their confessions were dismissed by a judge in 1974 because of the torture. Clifford Glover, a 10-year-old African American boy, was shot



woman, was shot and killed by policemen.

Rodney King brutally attacked by Los Angeles police. Despite the beating being videotaped, the officers involved were acquited. Riots ensued across Los

the police dropped from 64% in 1988 to Malcolm Green beaten to death by the 1992 **Detroit** Police Department.

Angeles. African Amercan approval of

Alicia Sotero Vasquez and Enrique Funes 1996 Flores beat by police in Los Angeles after with the goal of ending a freeway chase. Incident videotape. Abner Louima beaten and sodomized with a 1997

> police stick by a NYPD officer. He subsequently spe nt three months in the hospital. The beating resulted in street protests, a federal investigation, and lengthy

involved. Patrick Dorismond shot and killed by an undercover narcotics officer in New York. The officer attempted to buy drugs from Dorismond who refused. A backup officer shot and killed Dorismond.

prison sentences for two of the officers

Suffolk County police force Latina women 2001 to perform sexual acts and strip at traffic stops. In one case, a woman was forced to walk home in only her underwear. Chicago police sodomize Freddie Mason, a 2002

gay Black man, with a broomstick. Santiago "Chago" Villanueva killed by

police during an epileptic episode. Cau Bich Tran, a 25 year old Vietnamese woman, shot by San Jose police in her own home after they

mistook her vegetable peeler for a weapon. Michael Pleasence, 23, shot in the

head by a Chicago police officer. The officer was suspended for 30 days and then promoted. Miami police taser a Latino first-

2004 grader. A week later, they taser a 12 year old girl. Gus Rugley, 21, shot



Francisco police a high speed chase. Chicago police sodomize Coprez

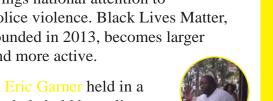
39 times by San

An LAPD officer sexually batters an Mayor Dinkins establishes undocumented Latina woman after she a civilian review board for reported a domestic abuse incident. police violence. However, The officer was convicted.

> A Minneapolis police officer beat a Haitian man saying "We Rodney Kinged

Americans, Latinos, and Lillian Fletcher, 62, tasered by Chicago 2007 Oscar Grant Native Americans are the police officers who forced their way

2014



Freddie Gray killed by

2020

1979 Eulia Love shot by Lo Angeles police after allegedly threatening officers with a knife. 1985 Edmund Perry, a 17-year-old black honors student, was killed by a plainclothes policeman. Chicago police officer

internationally

famous jazz

attacked by

escorting a blonde woman into

King Jr.'s peaceful protest in

police in New York after

musician, was

Jon Burge fired by Chicago police force. Since joining the force in 1972, he tortured over He frequently used the n-word, threatened defendants with physical violence, and told Black torturees that nobody would believe them because of their race. Despite the torture, many defendants who were tortured for a confession remained in prison after his suspension.

1999 misconduct complaints since 1979. He cracked open a man's skull causing permanent brain damage, broke a woman's arm, and committed several other beatings.

Amadou Diallo, 23, shot and killed by four plainclothes New York policemen who claimed he

was reaching for a gun. He was actually reaching for his wallet The murder resulted in protests at police headquarters, but the four officers involved were acquitted. 89% of Blacks, 61% of Whites, and 81% of Latinos believed that there was "absolutely no excuse" to kill Diallo. Furthermore, 73% of Blacks, 51% of Whites, and 60% of Hispanics believed the NYPD should hire more minority

LAPD officers rape a Native



officers.

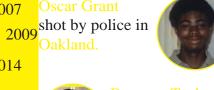
2003

ened by

housing unit who point a loaded gun to her head. They then force her to strip and destroy her belongings. Two weeks later, they wait outside her apartment, force her to undress and expose her genitalia to the officers, and threaten to remove her teeth if she refuses. None of the officers were arrested.

NYPD officers force a 35 year old Latina woman to perform oral sex on them in her apartment, with her three children sleeping nearby. Henry Glover shot by New Orleans policeman.







Minneapolis resident George Floyd killed by a police officer who kneeled on his neck for nine minutes. Despite Covid-19 and quarantine,

protests ensue across the country. Heavily armed police officers (and in Washington DC, the Armed Forces) escalate peaceful protests. Most major cities issue a

