

THIS IS WHY THINGS WILL KEEP WORSENING

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A Little Rock, Arkansas police officer shot Brendon Johnson a few days ago (<https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2023/oct/05/lr-officer-facing-shooting-charge/>). That Little Rock police officer shot Brendon Johnson in the back of his head as Brendon was fleeing – moving away from him – in a vehicle. The Little Rock police officer shot a fleeing person who was not threatening physical harm to anybody.

That police officer was recruited, hired, trained, and deployed by the same police agency that hired, trained, and deployed a former Little Rock officer who shot 15 times and killed Bradley Blackshire on February 22, 2019, less than five years ago.

The police officer who shot Brendon Johnson in the back of the head was recruited, hired, trained, and deployed by the same police agency that recruited, hired, trained, and deployed another former Little Rock officer who shot and killed unarmed Bobby Moore III on August 12, 2012, eleven years ago.

The police officer who shot Brendon Johnson in the back of the head was recruited, hired, trained, supervised, and deployed by the same police agency that recruited, hired, trained, deployed, and supervised another police officer who shot and killed unarmed Eugene Ellison, father of two Little Rock police officers, in his home on December 9, 2010.

In each instance, the assailant was recruited, hired, trained, deployed, and supervised by the largest local police agency in Arkansas.

In each instance, the victim was Black.

In each instance, local politicians and police leaders professed their sympathy for victimized Black people and their families. In some, but not all instances, families received monetary settlements.

Let's be clear. The condolences and the checks didn't stop the Little Rock Police Department from recruiting, hiring, training, deploying, and

supervising the police officer who shot Brendon Johnson in the back of the head.

Condolences and checks don't, won't, and can't change structural injustice in policing in the same way that sympathy cards and checks don't, won't, and can't fix the "leaning" Tower of Pisa in Italy. Faulty construction isn't corrected, let alone prevented, by condolences and settlement checks.

The Little Rock Police Department, like police departments across Arkansas and the United States, outfits its patrol officers with body cameras and its cruisers with motion activated video cameras.

That didn't prevent Brendon Johnson from being shot in the back of the head. It didn't prevent a former Little Rock police officer from shooting 15 times and killing Bradley Blackshire. It didn't stop Little Rock officers from killing Bobby Moore III, and Eugene Ellison.

Brendon Johnson isn't struggling to live after being shot in the back of the head, and Bradley Blackshire, Bobby Moore III, and Eugene Ellison aren't dead because the Little Rock Police Department had the *wrong equipment*. Johnson is struggling with a traumatic brain injury and the other victims are dead because the Little Rock Police Department has the *wrong ethics*.

I have been saying for years that abusive and homicidal policing is the result of the ethics surrounding policing. The ethics of policing is based on the validation of violence by agents of the government against civilians. Police, like people in the military, are recruited, selected, trained, deployed, and supervised for the express purpose of using violence in encounters with civilians.

Violence in language.

Violence in use of equipment.

Violence in posture.

But there is a deeper problem that explains why things are getting worse, and will worsen. People in the United States accept this as normal.

Police violence against unarmed civilians is routine, not exceptional. We hear and read about the most egregious instances. But the egregious instances are simply the tip of the iceberg of abusive and homicidal violence by police agencies in this society that has become more than a feature, but a fixture of our culture.

George Floyd

Sandra Bland

Breonna Taylor

Elijah McClain

Alton Sterling

Jacob Blake

Amadou Diallo

Michael Brown

Troy Davis

Shantel Davis

Renisha McBride

Eric Garner

Trayvon Martin

John Crawford IV

Oscar Grant

Sean Bell

Lena Baker

Ahmaud Arberry

Kumani Gray

Kendrick McDade

Laquan McDonald

Philando Castille

These names are not mere features in our history. They are distinct elements of the huge fixture of horrible, hateful, and heinous policing in the United States that Americans accept as necessary so affluent people can call themselves safe.

Hence, the leading presidential candidate for the Republican Party only days ago publicly called for people who engage in shoplifting to be shot (<https://nypost.com/2023/10/02/trump-calls-for-shoplifters-to-be-shot-to-save-the-nation/>).

We could dismantle the existing police structure if we were willing to do so. However, we are not willing.

Police agencies and politicians know we are not willing.

Courts and judges know we are not willing.

Insurance companies and banks know we are not willing.

Chambers of commerce know we are not willing to dismantle the iceberg.

Instead of dismantling the policing iceberg, we prefer to extend condolences and occasionally issue checks that are no substitutes for human lives.

Meanwhile, we will forget Brendon Johnson until the next travesty happens in this pandemic of state-licensed violence against civilians by people who we call “peace officers.”

That is why abusive and homicidal policing is worsening.

That is why it will keep getting worse.