

Black vs. Blue

Stephanie R. Williams

Note: This editorial was written in response to Jason L Riley's Wall Street Journal commentary "[Black Lives Matter' – but Really, Not So Much.](#)"

Dear Mr. Riley,

In your September 8, 2015 editorial, you offered scathing criticism of the Black Lives Matter movement that you believe started after the murder of Michael Brown. You insist that he is dead because of his own actions. I respectfully disagree. Michael Brown was *killed* because of his actions. He was *killed* because of his stature and demeanor. He was *killed* because of the color of his skin. Michael Brown did not do this to himself. Officer Darren Wilson did this to him. He abused his power to intentionally inflict harm and America gladly sanctioned it.

You condemn black-on-black crime as the real enemy. You persuade us that the Michael Browns of the world—the young, urban, black high school graduates—are more of a threat to fellow blacks than the police because of incredibly high rates of violence that we experience at the hands of other blacks.

Your fixation on “black-on-black” crime begs the seemingly obvious question: what is it? The phrase, rising to prominence in the 1980s, was used to highlight startling statistics about the likelihood of blacks to be victims of crimes perpetrated by other blacks. However, as David Wilson describes in his book, *Inventing Black-on-Black Violence: Discourse, Space, and Representation*, the term incited a “black crime panic” in the United States in the 80s and 90s. It served to pervert and dehumanize black men in the eyes of white America, creating a “villain, black youth.” By ignoring what leads to such crime, your editorial perpetuates this stereotype.

Rates of violence in largely minority cities are much greater than those in white suburban areas, according to a segregation and crime study done at Louisiana State University. However, when you discuss these circumstances, you exclude a proper

explanation. For example, Levittown, one of the first suburban tract housing communities, ensured that realtors for and owners of these houses were contractually obligated to prevent African Americans from moving into the area. As explained in Rice University's U.S. history textbook, the suburbs grew by a whopping 46% from 1950 to 1960, elevating whites to a new high level of affluence while excluding blacks from this progress. While blacks did see an 40% increase in average income between 1950 and 1960, they were still left to fend for themselves in our nation's cities. This proved to be most detrimental.

While this type of overt housing segregation was outlawed with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the isolation of blacks from their white counterparts was in no way finished. These discriminatory housing trends are continued, to some extent, by blacks themselves. Self segregation is a product of segregation in this country. The fact that we would rather live in our impoverished ghettos than somewhere else is a hideous indictment of the greater American society. According to a study published in the *Oxford Journals* by Dr. Edward Shihadeh and Nicole Flynn, present day isolation "undermine[s] the attachment of low-income blacks to the labor force." This leads to low job rates and high poverty rates. With little or no hope of providing for a family, traditional masculinity began to present itself very differently in America's urban areas. Masculine merit is measured through peer approval and a tough or violent persona. These and many more factors combined lead to a higher rate of crime in these communities today. It is not a simple lack of values in these people, like you suggest, but the natural results of a longstanding system of disadvantage.

You insist that the police can't do their jobs like they used to presumably because they are afraid of backlash from the very people that they are trying to protect. This implies that police need to be tougher in tougher areas and now, because of Black Lives Matter, they can't be. However, city violence has nothing to do with police violence. According to the 2015 Year-End Police Violence report, police were relatively mild in dangerous areas and were unnecessarily violent in areas with lower crime rates. On average, in the United States, the number of violent crimes per 1,000 people in the 60 largest cities was lower than the number of police killings per the same size population. There is no relationship between police brutality and violence in urban areas. As activist DeRay McKesson summarized, these statistics "just remind us that the police are *choosing* to be violent in communities." The level

of violence, measured in murder and brutal crime counts, has not effected cops' likeliness to kill members of the community. So why would it now?

You claim that black on black crime is the real enemy, yet you seem to have a very specific definition of this crime. Poor, young, urban black men killing other poor, young, urban black men. What say you then, about the death of Robert Wilson III? Officer Wilson, a Philadelphia native, was killed in the line of duty by two fellow black men in North Philadelphia. Is this just another routine case of black-on-black ghetto violence? Why then, did Officer Wilson get posthumously promoted to sergeant? Why were candlelit vigils held for him at the spot of his murder? Why did mayor Michael Nutter call him a "True American Hero"? What makes this any different from Poot and Bodie killing Wallace? What about the murder of Jermane Reid? He was shot and killed by another black man who just happened to be a police officer. Why are Black Lives Matter protesters up in arms over Reid's death when they, as you insist, turn a blind eye to blacks killing blacks? Why are they calling for punishment for this officer when you maintain that they are only in favor of "scapegoating...white America"?

Thus, I ask you to reconsider your idea of black on black crime. These cases point to more than racially homogenous killings as the plight of the African American community. What distinguishes these two cases from others of stereotypical "black-on-black crime" is evidently a power structure: a power privilege that is often manifested in black males' relationships with the police. The Black Lives Matter movement is fighting against an abuse of power and the system that protects it, for that is the true enemy to black lives. It's not about black on black. It isn't even about black vs. white. The true struggle arises between black and blue.

Sincerely,
Stephanie Williams
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